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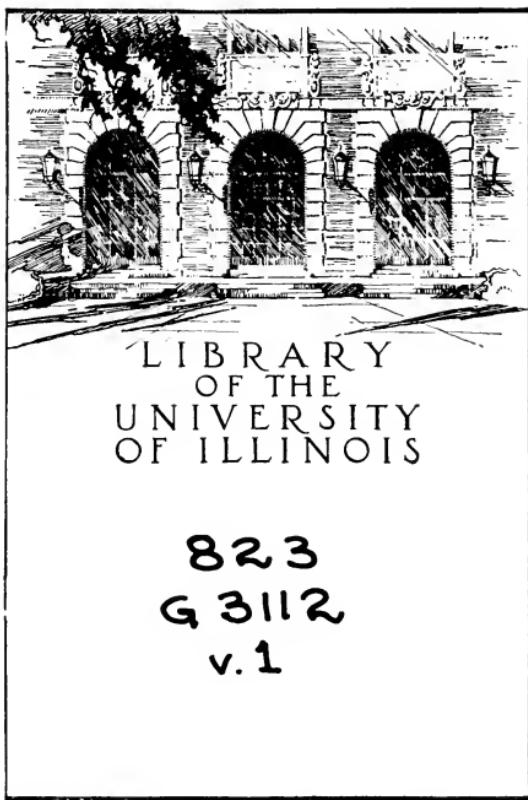
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BY THE AUTHOR OF "NO APPEAL."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
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TO

H E R

WHOSE UNCHANGING LOVE HAS CHEERED AND STILL CHEERS ME
ALL THROUGH THE TOIL OF LIFE.

August 30, 1870.

Dr. Ross Ray 3 July 52 Chislett = 3 V.

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GERALD HASTINGS
OF
B A R T O N.

CHAPTER I.

B A R T O N G R E E N.

“Methinks the mansion hath a mouldy air;
The ivy round the walls, the bars and bolts,
Are perishing of age.”

HARPER'S QUEST.

SOME few trees were left about the old place, tall and straight and goodly trees, such as manor houses so near to the smoke and grime of the great city will never grow again. But they, in truth,

belonged to a former generation; to days when all round Barton were green fields and gardens, and the huge, dingy, overgrown city was still far away, buried in its usual hazy pall of murky fog and smoke. Still they had been planted where they now stood by old Samuel Hastings' great grandfather, and held fast resolutely to their own native ground.

As to the Manor House itself, it was square and ugly enough, built of coarse red brick—brick stained and soddened and discoloured by the storms of two hundred winters, and now turning white in its old age in a garb of grey and white lichen, against which a rough coat of dark green rustling ivy shone in dismal contrast. The green ivy and the hoary brickwork were fighting hard for the mastery; and though the green leaves had the best of it all through the golden flush of summer, autumn

was now nearly over, and winter creeping on apace, and the Manor House, where a Hastings, father and son, had lived for some two hundred years, looked dismal and drear enough. It stood in the midst of what had once been a gay and pleasant garden, planted with choice shrubs and sunny flowers; but the hand of ruin and quiet decay appeared to have been busy there for many a year, and all along the winding paths, and ragged grass-plots, and deserted flower beds, seemed written the words neglect and decay. Plants and shrubs had straggled into coarse and abundant blossom, bloomed, faded, and died without a kindly hand to touch them, or a heart to rejoice in their beauty. The grass was growing up in rank profusion everywhere; in the beds, among the bushes, and even in the gravel-paths. Daisies and plantain had, inch after inch, swallowed up the grass-plots, along the edges of which

narrow strips of hard, slimy moss ran in bars, which neither rain nor sun seemed able to loosen.

Right and left of the garden, on either side of the Manor House which fronted the high road, spread pleasant meadows where cattle fed, and were driven home for shelter at sunset across the lea; and where, too, still might now and then be heard the song of the lark rising on glad wings to heaven.

The house had a score of small, square, mullioned windows in front, and below them a heavy, dark portico, with a flight of steps leading down to a sort of rude terrace once, long, long, ago ornamented with stone vases and baskets of flowers. And over all—windows, doorway, terrace, and flowers—now hung an air of desolation and silence, as if unfit to be inhabited, and only telling of the past. So much for the outside appearance of the house, to which

the inside grimly responded, in large dimly lighted rooms, scantily adorned with old and dusky furniture, moth-eaten curtains, stairs without carpet, walls blackened with cobwebs, and mantled with dust; and everywhere the one same story of sordid neglect and decay.

Yet Barton Manor House was inhabited; and though its tenants were but two in number, it is there that our story begins; and with Sam Hastings, the lord of the manor, who dwelt on the ground floor, and Sally Hill, the charwoman, who mouldered away in an underground kitchen which served for culinary purposes as well as for a dormitory, we must now make acquaintance.

The time is nine in the morning; and as a neighbouring clock strikes, a little, short, old-fashioned man clad in a dingy suit of black, makes his way out of the

high road through the rusty iron gates, and up the weedy gravel path to the front door. Bell-handles and wires have long since disappeared from the outer surface of the entrance; ever since, in fact, the bells answering thereto in the servants' hall were pulled down by the master of the house a score of years ago, and sold for old metal to Jem Danks at the corner of Green Arbour Lane. But a ponderous iron knocker, in spite of age and of rust, still holds its place on the door; and having sounded this twice heavily with a dull clang, the old man pushes open the door and enters, as if a well-known and welcome visitor. We must follow him.

He walks briskly down the broad passage, and opens a door at the further end, leading into a lofty, large, square room, round three sides of which bookshelves rise from the floor to the ceiling; and as you

brush by them, you may see that dust lies thickly on every volume, and on an old chest of drawers of black oak, with “S. H.” cut deeply into the wood. A very small fire occupies one side of the room; so small, indeed, that it might be easily packed into a breakfast-cup. A small tent-bed fills a corner of the room; and a round table in the centre seems to be laid for breakfast, having on it a small loaf of bread, a tiny milk-jug, a tin teapot, about an ounce of butter, and a plate of watercress.

By the fire, in an old tattered armchair of dingy leather, sat a little withered chip of an old man, very neatly and trimly dressed, though in clothes that had gone out of fashion forty years before, with his hat on, and a short black stick in his right hand.

This was Samuel Hastings, the owner of the Manor House and many a fair acre of

land round about it, and the possessor—so said the good people of Barton Green—of untold thousands in the Three per Cents; to say nothing of sundry scattered houses, and even whole groups of squalid tenements behind the main street, on the way into Babylon. He had just breakfasted, and as he pulled on his Hessian boots, was busily computing the exact cost of his breakfast, which he calculated at about three halfpence, having indulged in the unusual luxury of watercress. At that moment the door opened, and in walked Bob Winnecot the barber.

“Five minutes late, Bob!” said the old man; “I was just giving you up, and going out on one of my rounds. Where have you been dawdling?”

“You won’t catch me a-dawdling, Mister Hastings—not if I knows it. But you see, customers come in uncommon thick

this mornin', and I says to my old gal, I says, 'Beards is beards now, and I can't afford to lose sich a chin as Mister Slodger's and this 'ere other gent's, which he come in quite permiscous, he did; so I'll just polish 'em off afore the clock strikes nine, and then cut round to the manner 'ouse in time for the master, and for my bit of——'"

"And that's just what you won't have, Bob. Breakfast was ready ten minutes ago, and yours too, if you had been in time. But Sally is coming to clear away now, and I must be shaved at once. I can't waste time as well as good victuals. A penny saved, you know, is a penny got. Breakfast can't be kept waiting here all day."

Then the old man laid aside hat and stick, and Bob Winnecot began to operate on his patient's chin; during which operation a

broken fire of small talk went on between master and servant.

Barbers have been given to gossip from time immemorial, and Bob Winnecot was no exception to the general rule. He had a queer habit of pouring out little, short, disjointed sentences to his listener, sometimes leaving them altogether unfinished, and at others taking up the thread of his story again after an interval of silence, during which, perhaps, his razor required more than usual care in the handling.

His present customer was apparently a good listener; though he now and then snappishly contradicted the man of soap-suds, or openly laughed at the news he brought.

The talk began, as such talk usually does, with the weather, and then wandered away in a desultory fashion to the last local news, and especially to the subject of the

cholera, which was just then ravaging some of the nearer back-slums of the great city with great virulence. Winnecot, it must be remembered, was an old and tried attendant at the Manor House, having shaved the master every day regularly for the previous twenty years. He spoke, therefore, with a sort of deference for the old man, and yet with a quiet familiarity which helped him to touch on all subjects, and to endure snubbing with great calmness.

“How are the crops, Winnecot?”

“Well, sir, they do say, that down Torrington Lane way, where I come from when I was a boy, thirty years agone——”

“Thirty, Bob? more like fifty—you’re eighty, Bob, if you are a day.”

“Where I come from thirty year agone, sir,—that things was looking pretty well till that terrible storm bust out last Sun-

day mornin' while the people was at Divine service, sir. Something fell outside, sir, they suppose something of a bolt, sir."

"No doubt, Bob, the bolt of the church-door ; it's a rickety old place, as well as I remember. And did they pick it up ?"

"Bless you, no, sir. That 'ere bolt went right through a tombstone, so they say, sir, of a poor widow-man, that was only a buried there a fortnight agone, and his wife took with twins, she was, that same night, one on 'em with a black mark all down his left leg. So they says, sir."

Then came a silence.

"The cholera's uncommon bad, sir, down our way. Up Green Arbour Court, just behind our shop, there was five took yesterday, and one on 'em tended to the fire hisself."

“ What on earth do you mean, Winnecot, by tended on the fire—what fire?”

“ They had tar-barrels a-blazing all down High Street last week, all night long a'most, and camphor bags round their necks,—what the parish give out—and Master Gorsett he wore a bag, he did—and 'twas but last Saturday he was in my shop to get a clean face ; he was took, he was, and now he's no more ; and he was blind, so I'm told, sir, and his legs swelled afore he went off. And a lady, so they say, sir, she fell down in the street a Thursday, and went off—she did—in the dropsy—line—something—so—I'm—told, sir.”

“ Pack of lies, Winnecot—pack of lies. I wonder how you ever get together such a string of rubbish; but you must talk I know—it's oil to your old bones—meat and drink. By the way, what a price those

rascally butchers are charging for meat. It's enough to make a famine. Ninepence a pound for neck of mutton, as I'm a living man, and it won't last us three days here ; that old woman downstairs has such an awful appetite. We shall have bread up to sevenpence halfpenny before long, I suppose. I believe those villains, the butchers and bakers, are in league together to ruin all of us poor people——”

“ No doubt you feels it, sir—no doubt,” interrupts Winnecot ; “ but if you wants to know what pinching is and dear bread is, just you come down into Green Arbour Lane for a week.”

“ Me, Bob, not know what dear bread is? me ! with this great house to keep going, rates and taxes to pay, and a man to look after that place of mine at Shepherd's Bush, and two great hulking sons at

school, not earning a sixpence towards their living, but costing me a hundred a year ! Good God, Winnecot ! what are you dreaming of ? If I was not to look after things a little, and contrive here and contrive there, I should be eaten out of house and home in less than a month. It's bad enough in Green Arbour Court, I dare say, but you see, Bob, I have to keep up appearances, and they have not. I *must* have a joint once a week, and sometimes twice. They needn't. And potatoes are cheap, I'm told, and one can live very well on potatoes."

Another silence. Then the barber broke out again.

"I know a man, sir, keeps a potato shop in our street, and he bought a pig——"

"Bought a whole pig, Winnecot ? What business had he to buy a whole pig in these times ?"

“He bought a pig a Saturday night, and a Sunday he had two fits——”

“*Two* fits? I wonder that he hadn’t a dozen. What right has any man in these days, when mutton is up to ninepence, to buy more than a pound of pork? The extravagance of poor people just now is something fearful.”

“Well, sir, he kep a shop, he did, and sold sossidges, and I’m told, sir, that one pig lasted for six months, what with the seasonin’, and the allspice, and the beet-root, and the sawdust. Why, you see, sir, he kep sossidges o’ all kinds, he did, beef and pork, and Germans, and polonies, and fresh country sossidges up twice a week from Devoncheere, and real Cambridge, and Hamburg, and all come out of that there one pig. Ah! he’s an uncommon clever chap, he is.”

“Well, Bob, I must say he’s not a

bad hand if he makes that pig last six months."

"Yes, sir, he is a tidy hand, and so was his father a tidy hand, and most reg'lar at Divine service a Sundays—in the 'quire'—mostly on the fiddle ; you see, his father was mostly on the fiddle, before him."

By this time the whole shaving operation was over, and Winnecot began to pack up his apparatus ; while Hastings went to the old chest of drawers close by and hunted for some stray papers which he wanted in his day's march.

"Bob," he suddenly called out, "while I'm getting my papers ready, you can easily take your breakfast ; but be careful with the butter, and with the milk, things are at such a price now. And keep an eye on the flies ; it's astonishing what those flies manage to devour in half an hour while

one is busy. Keep an eye on the flies."

The old man was not slow to obey orders, for he knew that in the course of a very few minutes he might expect to see old Sally enter the room to clear away the breakfast things, and the "master" off on his day's round.

He therefore set to work vigorously on the scrap of bread and butter that remained ; every now and then making little sudden stabs at the few half-starved creatures that buzzed over the empty jug and butter-dish, and exclaiming, as he missed a nimble bluebottle, "A speedy thing, sir, is they flies."

"That's right, Bob," answers the master, "that's right; every one you kill is as good as killing a thief and a robber—out of a poor man's pocket too. And now Bob, we will have the things cleared away. A

heavy breakfast is always bad, especially when the cholera's about."

Whereupon the barber once more caught up his bag, and wishing the master good morning, made his way down the long passage to the front door, just as old Sally Hill made her appearance in the breakfast room.

"Clear away, Sally," said Hastings. "I am going out for a day's work in Barton's Rents, and may not be home to-night. Don't wait up for me after eight o'clock, it will save candles and firing; and these times one must be careful. Do you hear, old woman?"

"Yes, yes, I hears fast enough; and I ought to know by this time that we've got to be careful, as I've heard it every night for pretty nigh thirty year. Yes, yes, I knows."

"Then don't be content with knowing,

but practise what you know, Sally. Don't forget the hymn book says,

“‘ But always practise what you know.’

“It's the best line in the book. Butter at one and two; bread, sevenpence half-penny, and meat an awful price. I shall be at home to-morrow early. The cold mutton for dinner; don't hash it, it wastes meat to hash it, terribly. So be careful, Sally, be careful.”

With these words the master of Barton Manor House, having lodged his roll of papers in an inner pocket, and taken from a corner a favourite short, thick malacca cane, at last set out on his day's tramp; and left his old and faithful domestic to her meditations.

Barton's Rents was the name given to a little group of squalid houses in a back street that branched off the main thorough-

fare just where the smoke and dirt of London proper began to hold supreme sway—some two miles from the Manor House. House by house, and court after court, the old man had bought up these wretched abodes of dirt, poverty, and vice; letting them out by rooms, or even half rooms, at low rents, which however he exacted with the utmost rigour; collecting them with his own hands every month, and carrying the proceeds home to be stored up in an iron safe at Barton. It often took him a whole long day to go through a district of this kind; but when thus benighted, he would often beg for a night's lodging where there happened to be a spare bed, or hunt up some empty tenement of his own in a neighbouring street—generally in charge of some poor charwoman—and there get a resting-place for the time.

“Victuals I must have,” he would say,

“wherever I am, and here I get my bed and bit of fire gratis, and into the bargain.”

This he had done for many years; never, as he often boasted, having been robbed of a penny, or in any way molested.

In most of these wretched tenements and streets he was well-known as Sam Hastings, the old miser of Barton; and on the whole regarded with some fear and respect. One secret of his safety was that he had a stout arm and carried a heavy stick; and showed not a grain of fear as he went in and out of the worst courts and alleys to be met with. But besides this, he was known to too many neighbours to be plundered without risk. It was said also, that he always carried a loaded pistol with him when he lodged for a night away from his own home. And though this was not true, the report served him almost as well as if it had been.

With these few words of introduction, we must leave him to wend on his way towards London, and glance for a while at other scenes and characters in our story.





CHAPTER II.

BARTON VILLA.

“ ‘Tis not a lip or eye, we beauty call,
But the full force and joint effect of all.”

POPE.



MILE nearer to London proper, and yet tolerably free from the grimy smoke of the great city, partly shaded by a couple of horse-chestnut trees, and facing the high road, was a small detached villa, the abode of Mr. John Thorn, Solicitor, as a brass plate told every one who passed the gate. He was a shrewd, kindly old man with a round bullet-head beginning to grow bald; a square firm chin and smooth face, and a pair of grey eyes under heavy brows. He

had a quiet but old-established business in Lincoln's Inn, to which he went every day into London, and was known among most of his neighbours as old "Jack Thorn." None were familiar enough to call him Jack to his face; but all who really knew him liked his pleasant, genial talk, and were amused with his caustic tongue as long as it did not touch themselves.

He and his wife and daughter are sitting at dinner—a quiet, homely dinner, but well served, and crowned with good wine, when some little gossip took place, which will help to introduce our heroine; at whom, however, we must glance for a moment before she answers her father's question.

"Well, Amy, child, what news have you got for your father, after his long day's work in that atrocious fog that filled Lincoln's Inn all the morning?"

The young girl, who looked up brightly

at him as she spoke, was small and slightly made, but of perfect grace in the outline both of face and figure. Her hair, of so deep a brown as to appear quite black but when the sunshine touched it with a golden ripple, hung about her face in a cluster of natural curls, and in wonderful profusion; while in her eyes, which were of the same hue, there lurked an infinite amount of passion and tenderness, full of quiet grace, and yet every now and then telling of an inner depth, and of fire that might easily be roused into flashes of scornful pride or keener indignation. They were eyes to be loved, and yet to be dreaded, though always gleaming with a tender liquid light, that soon won the attention of all whom the owner cared to win. She was dressed plainly and simply, in a dark grey silk trimmed with old-fashioned black lace, and wore a small spray of crimson geranium

in her hair. Altogether she looked pleasant and piquant, especially for a weary man to chat with after a long day's work.

At the other end of the table, opposite to her husband, sat Mrs. Thorn, paler and even slighter than her daughter, but with the same grace of figure, and much of the same beauty of face, save that it was less full of intellect. Mrs. Thorn was just forty, and her life was devoted to crochet, at which she worked at all hours with indefatigable diligence.

Twenty years before Jane Umber's charming face and ladylike manner had won for her a very eligible husband, then a junior partner in the house of Dalton and Thorn. She had borne him three sons, who had all died in childhood; but as the years went by she never relaxed in quiet amiability of temper or devotion to her husband, of whose genius and intellect, as well as of her

only daughter's beauty, she was justly proud. She played a little on the piano, and sang in a sweet faint voice some few of the now old-fashioned ballads which had long ago won her husband's praise, as she said, "in their younger days; but now you see, my dear, he comes home tired to his dinner, and likes a bit of classical music from Amy, if he has time for any; and then I have got my crochet to look after, so we're all three pleased."

Her daughter inherited all her beauty of expression, but while she had her mother's good looks, the strength, passion and life of her face sprang from the wiry, vigorous "old man"—as he persisted in calling himself—who now waited for an answer to his question.

"News!" she gaily replied, "what news can you expect from me who haven't stirred beyond the garden gate since you left home

this morning? *You* are the person, papa, who should supply us with news, coming straight from the centre of life, bustle, pleasure, and business—is he not, mamma?"

"I think that your father is tired, and wants his dinner, my child; so we will just let him rest until—"

"No, no! he has brought it on himself. He began to catechize me for news the very moment we sat down, and I shall give him no rest now until he has opened his budget; for I know by his face that he has a budget which he is itching to unfold at this very moment."

"Well, well," said the lawyer, "let me finish this slice of mutton, and you shall hear what I have to tell."

"There, mamma, I told you so! I knew it! Talk of us women, indeed, being unable to keep anything secret! Commend me to your grave, elderly gentleman with

a bald head and white whiskers, and a pair of terrible eyebrows frowning at you, like a judge at the witness-box, for not being able to keep a scrap of news for five minutes after sitting down to dinner. If the fish doesn't unlock his tongue, a glass of sherry is sure to do it."

" You are a very saucy, impertinent young woman, and I wonder that your mother can sit there and encourage you in such slander on a defenceless old man. But I *have* got a scrap of news for you, Amy. Now guess what it's about."

" No, papa, I shall not guess ; but I insist on being told at once. Guessing is all very well for little boys, or people who live on riddles, but not for a young lady of eighteen."

" Boys, Amy ! Well, oddly enough, my news is about boys. This morning, as I went into town, whom should I overtake

but old Sam Hastings plodding along, as usual, with his thick stick in one hand and his blue bag in the other, going off on his day's march, collecting money in Barton's Rents. We soon got into talk, and the end of it was that he went on with me to Lincoln's Inn, and after a great deal of idle gossip of one sort and another—the cholera and the awful price of provisions—began to tell me about his two sons, who for the last seven or eight years have been away at that school in Lincolnshire. They must have been there ever since their mother died, I think. The old man has kept them there, tight at work, holidays and all, for these eight years; but now they won't stand it any longer."

"Well, papa, suppose that they won't stand it any longer; how can their running away at all concern me?"

"What can it concern you, miss? A

great deal; inasmuch as they threaten to run away from school at once if their father does not have them home, where, *he* says, 'he cannot afford to keep them; and to which *they* say they will return, whether he likes it or not. And they are old friends of yours, Amy. Tony, the eldest always said that if he was ever rich enough to have a wife at all, he would have you; and as for Gerald—that determined young dog with an eye like a hawk—he fell in love with you long before he went into Lincolnshire; his mother has told me so a score of times, and how he used to watch to catch a glimpse of your face as he went by the gate, every morning on his way to the day-school on the green. You must remember Gerald, poor boy, with his bright, laughing eyes, and a blush on his cheek?"

"My dear papa, he is a mere boy, and——"

"He was a mere boy once, but he is only

a year younger than Miss Amy Thorn now; mind that, my dear. And his brother Tony is a year older; a little, fat, stodgy fellow, with a low forehead, and his angry hair like so much grass along the upper border of it, I have no doubt still."

"O yes; I remember the little creature, and his conceit about his reading at the dame's school. He was always telling us what he had learned to repeat by heart, and boasting of it to somebody or other, the little monkey."

"Yes, yes," replied her father; "I think I hear him now beginning with his verses from Milton—

"‘Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising *sweat*!’

He hadn't the faintest notion of what the words meant, or the music of the line."

"My dear," said kindly Mrs. Thorn, "don't be too hard upon the young man. I

dare say he has learned how to read long before this."

"I hope so," replied Miss Amy; "I hope so, if only for his friends' sake. But is that all your budget, papa? You look now as if you still had a long tale to unfold."

"Only this, that old Hastings has formally appointed me guardian of the boys, if he should die before Tony is of age, and this morning signed all the necessary papers. The stingy old fellow wouldn't let me make his will for him, as I suggested; but coolly told me that he made it himself ten years ago, when his wife died — made it himself, purely to save money. 'It is all,' he says, 'duly signed and sealed, without a farthing to the lawyers.' All I can say is, I never knew a layman yet who tried to make his own will and did not write himself down an ass in some shape or other. He was puzzled how to appoint a guardian,

or he would have tried that too. But, mind you, Amy, when they come back you must look out for the eldest son, Tony. He must have all the land, for it's entailed; and I have no doubt that he will have the best part of the money; for he is just as great a screw, I hear, as his father, and delights him by saying that he has saved up all his pocket-money for the last year and a half, and intends to put it into the savings' bank when he comes home. This has won old Sam's heart."

"And is the old miser going to allow his sons to come home?"

"He can't prevent them. That's the beauty of it. They swear they will run away, if he does not fetch them."

"My dear John," says Mrs. Thorn, "they can't run all the way from Boston."

"O yes, my dear, they can. Don't you remember Tom Hood's words to his old

friend in Lincolnshire ? ‘ It’s only ninety mile or so to York ; put on corduroys, and don’t mind the cut-behinds.’ No doubt they will come fast enough. Old Hastings forgets that they are no longer children. How they will get on at the Manor House, is another question altogether. He grumbles at spending sixty or seventy pounds a year on himself and old Sally Hill, his house-keeper ; and when these ravenous young giants come home from school, after years of hard work and scanty food, half-cooked meat all the week and ‘ Resurrection Pie’ on Saturdays, they will fairly eat him out of house and home ; tho’ his real income, I have no doubt, is five thousand a year at least. His savings, too, must be enormous ; though I’m told by old Winnecot, his factotum, that not a sixpence finds its way into any bank. The Manor House is full of holes and corners, and there Dives has been

hoarding for these forty years, just like his father before him, and *his* father before him, hoarding up bags of gold, and saying, Don't let us eat, don't let us drink, and don't let us be merry."

" My dear John," interrupts Mrs. Thorn again, "I wish you would not quote Scripture in that way ; it sounds quite profane, though you don't mean it so."

" Mean to be profane, my dear Jane ! certainly not, for a moment. It's only the way that the New York Plymouth Brethren talk, and all the people in the 'Good Gas-lighter,' and 'Squeaky,' or the 'Narrow, Narrow World,' and all the goody people do."

" What a dreadful old wretch he must be !" interrupts Miss Amy. " But he inherits his stinginess from his father and his grandfather you say, papa ; were they all as bad as he ?"

“ Not quite so bad, my dear ; they have gone through the three degrees of comparison, I think, *miser*, *miserior*, *miserrimus*, and old Sam is the superlative. That hankering after money, for money’s sake, runs in the family, just like a particular Nose, from father to son ; getting more and more scrubby and mean and abominable, till it ends in a mere abortion of a snub, like that little rascally apothecary’s in the High Street, who charged me for fifteen visits in a fortnight, when I had that bad throat last winter. But, skinflint or not, my dear, these two young men will be home before long beyond a doubt, if they can get away from ‘ Do-the-Boys Hall,’ settle down here at the Manor House, plague their wretched old father’s life out of him by the fierceness of their appetites, and sooner or later find their way here to Barton Villa. But don’t forget, Miss

Thorn, that Tony is the Lord of the Manor."

"I hate him already!" cries the indignant young girl, with flashing eyes. "I hate him, with his selfish, cringing ways; and I hope he will never come here!"

"But he is much altered for the better, so I hear, both in mind and body. The master of the school writes to say that both have made excellent progress during the last few years, and are fine handsome young fellows. All I wonder at is that the old hunks up yonder ever spared money enough to educate them at all."

"Perhaps that runs in the family too."

"There you are right, Amy, I believe. Old Sam's father and grandfather were both educated men; both were at Westminster; and both dressed well to the very last; though both grudged every farthing that was spent, and added thousands to the

income from Barton Manor before they died. But joking apart, my child, it will never do for you to marry a poor man, brought up as you have been. Besides, with such a face and such a head-piece as yours, my dear, you deserve to be Lady Bountiful at the Manor House. But come, Amy, I want a morsel of music, to drive all these musty miserly hungry things out of my brain. So take my arm, wife, crochet and all, and let us go upstairs for a cup of coffee and a page of Beethoven."





CHAPTER III.

MASTER AND SERVANT.

“The wretched being starves amidst his store,
Broods o'er his gold, and grasping still at more,
Sits sadly pining, and believes he's poor.”

DRYDEN.

HE old charwoman, Sally Hill, sat up late for her master on the night following his visit to Barton's Rents, but, as he had surmised, she sat up in vain ; for Sam Hastings did not return until late the following morning, and then out of humour; many of his tenants had been behindhand with their rents, and he had brought back but a scanty store of guineas. That day he dined early, and even more sparingly than usual, lock-

ing himself into his own room as soon as it was dusk, and spending several happy hours in hunting through various drawers, pigeon-holes, and other secret hiding-places—pouring the various hoards out on an old library table, and surveying with infinite satisfaction all the piles of silver, copper, and gold. This done, and all having been put back into their usual hiding-places, he retired early to bed, made his supper on a scanty basin of gruel, so as to save the expense of fire in his sitting-room, and slept so late as to be scarcely ready for Winnecot on the following morning. But he roused himself at last, and got up and dressed ; and then ensued a short dialogue, which, though unconnected and desultory enough, helps to carry our story onwards one little stage further.

“ Winnecot,” said the old man, “ I had a bad day yesterday.”

“ So I see, sir.”

“ You see, sir? How on earth can that be? Has Sally been gossiping as usual, the old cat?”

“ I haven’t seen nothing of Sally, cat or no cat, master; or kitten neither, this morning. But I knows well enough that if so be you had had a good day yesterday, with a tidy purse, you wouldn’t a laid a bed this mornin’. It ain’t hard to guess that much.”

“ Well, Bob, you are not far wrong there. They were most of them behind-hand with their rents ; and besides that, the lawyers got hold of me.”

“ What lawyers, master?”

“ Old Jack Thorn, of course—though, for that matter, they are all sharks, every one of ‘em. However, he got hold of me, and made me sign some papers appointing him the Boys’ guardian if they come

home—and they swear they will come, Bob!"

"Well, sir, eighteen is a tidyish age for a boy to be kep at school, I must say; and Mr. Tony must be that if he's a day, sir, to say nothing of Mr. Gerald. I wonder they stops there, that I do, all these years."

"They *must* stop there. It will ruin me to have them home here now, Winnecot, with bread, meat, beer, and everything at such awful prices, and they with appetites like plough-boys!"

"But they costs something where they be, master, and *must* cost, unless they lives upon hair."

"Yes, but it's cheaper there, Bob—cheaper; because you see, whatever they eat or drink I only pay so much a half year, and I know the worst of it. But once at home here, I shall never know the worst of it. Their stomachs will be always

craving. And then they'll want new clothes, and there will be doctors' bills, and all sorts of luxuries. It will never, never do, Bob—I shall be ruined, I know I shall."

Then followed a silence, during which a stiff island of beard just below the chin was being mowed, and Bob, holding his patient by the nose, was severely intent on his professional duties.

"I tell you what I shall do, Winnecot ; I shall sell some of the furniture that's lying about the place."

"But there's none to sell, master. As to the old beds and bedding upstairs, who'll buy 'em? The downstairs rooms is all stripped pretty well bare, 'cept of a parcel of dusty stuff that nobody would look at. Twenty years agone you might 'a sold some of it; but now them brokers wouldn't give you five shillings for the lot."

“ But there is this room, Bob ; you forget this room. There are hundreds of books here, in good bindings too ; and half a dozen library chairs, and that old chest of drawers ; and the bookshelves can’t be of any use when the books are gone. You can call and tell Danks to come up to me, on your way home, and he shall come and take away the lot to-morrow.”

But to this latter arrangement the faithful old serving man had a grand objection. He knew that this one room now held all that remained of the old family furniture, and there was still left in him a spark of pride which rebelled against the house being stripped utterly bare before the young masters came home.

“ Well, master,” he answered, “ I don’t know how much a pound Jem Danks may give for them books, but I’m pretty certain

he wouldn't take the cheres at no price. Besides, you must have somethink to sit on, I 'spose, when the young masters come home, unless you're all a going to be like the deaf and dumb gentleman bornd down in Southwark, that hadn't got no legs and arms, and was tied on to his board. And as for the Chest o' drawers, I don't mind taking that myself, if you must get rid of it, just to kip my papers in for the Club nights and the Parish shavin' account."

This proposal, of striking a bargain, at once roused up the old Lord of the Manor into sudden life, and forced him to begin haggling with his customer as to the price.

"Well, well, Bob," he answered, "what you say is true enough ; and you shall have the old chest of drawers a bargain, though it is as good as new ; I cleared it out last night, and you may as well pay for

it and take it away at once. It has been here these forty years to my knowledge ; but it is a good sound article now, Bob, and with care will last forty years more—longer than you will, any how. There's my father's initials, S. H., cut in the old oak, as fresh as ever."

The price—only a few shillings—was at last agreed upon ; and that same day a man with a truck came to the Manor House and carried away the bargain home to Bob Winnecot's own shop, No. 26, Belton Street, Green Arbour Court ; the new owner himself attending in person to superintend the removal.

"Bob," said the old miser, "you have cheated me, I verily believe ; but I won't draw back from my bargain now, of course."

But no sooner was the purchaser fairly out of the Manor House grounds, than

Hastings, smiling grimly to himself, sat down in his old leathern chair and began to survey the matter from another point of view.

“It’s not worth half a crown,” he chuckled to himself; “the hinges are off nearly every pigeon-hole inside; the drawer handles are loose, and all the keys are gone. They were in bad order enough when Anne kept her odds and ends and receipts there, and that’s a matter of fifteen or sixteen years ago. Bravo, Sam Hastings!”

Then he opened a small cupboard in a recess behind his bed, and added ten shillings to a hoard of silver in a canvas bag, dropping them in one by one, with intense satisfaction.

The thought of this little transaction seemed to administer great comfort to him throughout the rest of the day. He smiled

and chuckled to himself again and again, with an air of quiet comfort that attracted the notice even of old Sally Hill when she came upstairs to remove the tea-things.

“Sally, I will have a pigeon for dinner to-morrow—a whole one. Do you hear, Sally?”

“Yes, yes, I hear. Not that you’ll be able to eat a whole one. You won’t have the heart to do it, you know, when the time comes.”

Then the old man went out into a smaller garden at the back of the old house, drearier even than the front one, in the corner of which stood an old shed that he and Bob together had turned into a sort of rough cot for pigeons. And here, to his intense joy, he found that one of the young birds, not half fledged, had tumbled out of the nest, and fallen

heavily to the ground. There it lay dead at his feet, hardly cold, but still dead. Here was good fortune indeed. In another five minutes the cat would have had it.

And he hurried in with his prize, chuckling once more with intense satisfaction at being able to sup, if not dine, free of cost.

“He’s been a counting of his money again, that’s it,” said the old woman to herself as she reached her own sanctum in the kitchen, “and a found a fourpenny bit, maybe, as he didn’t know of before; and now flop down comes this poor half growed pigeon. Well, well, the young masters is comin’, that’s one good job. They’ll spend it for ‘un, if it was a hundred fourpenny-bits. And to think, too, of their never bein’ once home ever since their poor mother died. Poor lambs! And the cholera, too, a ragin’ all

down High Street. Well, people says eatin' and drinkin' too much is a bad thing for it. They won't catch it here that way, any how."

And then poor old Sally Hill bolted the kitchen door, said her prayers and a special one against the pestilence, put a little bag of camphor round her neck, and lay down to sleep soundly until morning.

Meanwhile, upstairs, the Lord of the Manor, who was thinking only of his guineas, and the two hungry wolves of sons who were coming to eat him out of house and home, lay tossing on his bed, and vainly trying to sleep. Everything seemed against him that night. The wind rattled in the chimneys ; the old doors and panels creaked on their hinges ; and gaunt ghastly rats scampered across the floor where not even a crumb fell from the rich man's table. More than once he started

up in his bed and listened ; and once he actually rose, and, quickly huddling on a few clothes, struck a light, and examined one or two of his chief hoards to see if all was right. Not a thing was out of its place, and not a sound was in the old house that had not been there for scores of previous years.*

But at last utter weariness quietly overcame him, and he fell into a heavy sleep —dreaming still, however, of his darling treasures ; then that meat had gone up to a shilling a pound, and that Mike Sullivan, his chief tenant in Barton's Rents, had levanted without paying him a farthing. The agony of this last horror woke him from his broken slumber, just as daylight appeared ; and he started up, to dress hastily and at once set off to town in quest of the defaulter.

“Sally,” said the old man, “tell Winne-

cot when he comes, that I have had to go off early to Barton's Rents, and shall not want him to-day. That will save his breakfast, anyhow."





CHAPTER IV.

NO. 26, BELTON STREET.

“Aspice tonsoris limen, succede viator!
Mappa subest, ardet culter, et unda tepet.”

MUSÆ ETON.

HE life described in the previous chapters as going on at Barton Manor House, went on, with little variety, all the year round; as, indeed, it had done for twenty previous years. Hastings saw no visitors at his own house, and, except for purposes of business, never paid visits to any of his neighbours. Now and then he spoke a familiar word or two to his old servant, Sally, and every day he endured, either gladly or impatiently, the idle gossip of his old-fashioned barber.

But with these exceptions, no other event broke the monotony of his existence—for life it could scarcely be called—but when, at the close of the day, he sometimes unlocked all his treasures, and having carefully barred up door and window, spent some golden hours in handling the bags of coin which he loved too well to put to the profane use of spending. Gradually, ever since his wife's death and the banishment of his sons to the school in Lincolnshire, he had grown more and more morbidly fond of a lonely life, more eaten up with the passion of hoarding, and more dead to all other feelings. Thus more and more he had grown to dread the idea of their return home, which he imagined would at last, in some way or other, open the door to new and lavish expenditure: and thus touch the golden store for which he was now spending his life and strength.

That some day or other he must die, and leave all the treasure behind him to be squandered by those two very sons, he knew well enough. The grand thing now was, to stave off the evil time as long as possible; and while life was in him to keep them from breaking into his treasures. At last, after much perplexing thought, a new idea had come into his mind. If they insisted on leaving school, and did actually make their way home, they should not come to the Manor House at all, but to one of his empty tenements beyond Barton's Rents, in which he would at once fit up a room or two for them. There he would allow them so much a week to board themselves; and not one farthing a week more than the fixed sum should be paid to or for them. In this way he thought he should be as safe as if they were at school. The idea perfectly charmed him, and he set

about putting it into execution without delay.

Bob Winnecot had naturally, in due course, heard of the proposed plan, said what he dared by way of objection, but finding all his words useless, had at last given in; and having wished the master good morning, as usual, set out for Green Arbour Court in rather a grumbling frame of mind.

No. 26, Belton Street, was not an attractive residence at any time,—and just then it was dull November weather; mud of the blackest and slimiest covered road and pavement, the gutters reeked with filth, and a grimy fog brooded over the whole of the narrow street—as it had brooded there for days before. All this was against the little man; and it was no small addition to his troubles when he found his wife, Sarah—a tall, scraggy woman, with slightly red

hair, and a thin, unhappy voice—ready to pounce on him the moment he entered the shop; which he did with slow and weary steps.

“ Why, you’re enough to drive a woman crazy, Winnecot, a-coming rampaging over my clean floors with that heap o’ muck on your shoes; that’s what you are. Can’t you see I’m cleaning up?”

“ Yes, my dear, I see you’re cleaning up; but the old master’s off on his travels to Barton’s Rents again, without even a clean face, so what could I do but come home? I knows all about the muck, Sarah, and as soon as I’ve got my bag I’m off again to Titcomb Square. It’s my old gent’s day for havin’ his hair curled and got up for Sunday, at No. 15; and maybe I shan’t be home till latish in the afternoon, as there’s a tidy lot of ‘em at the Workus’ for to-morrow, and me not so speedy as I was thirty year ago.”

And with these words the little old man, having taken the bag which contained his white apron and full shaving apparatus, kissed his youngest child, and set out for Titcomb Square.

And a queer figure he certainly looked, as he slowly made his way down that grimy, crowded street. He was very short and bandy-legged; his black coat was far too large and too long for him; the wind was blowing hard from the east against his face, and it was as much as he could possibly do to make any progress against these various enemies. Altogether, he reminded one of nothing so much as those inimitable lines :

“ As when a dabchick waddles through the copse,
On feet and wings, and flies and wades and hops,
So, labouring on with shoulders, hands, and head,
Wide as a windmill, all his figure spread.”

POPE.

But although he made his way safely

enough to Titcomb Square, and to the Barton Workhouse at a later hour, finishing his work at both places with all due completeness—he did not return to the bosom of his wife and family that night until long after his usual time; and even then with a pale and terrified face, a hat much damaged and stained with mud, and a wobegone look about his face which utterly disarmed Sarah—that austere woman—and turned her words of intended reprobation into severe pity.

“Why, Winnecot! why, what ‘ave you bin a-doin’ with yourself all this blessed day? I haven’t set eyes upon you ever since ten o’clock this morning, and me a poor lone woman with three blessed children. Why, I might as well be a grass-widow at once! And you—you look dreadful!”

“Well, Sarah, the fact is I ain’t wery

well in myself, and I think that I'll go up and lie down a bit—upstairs—if you'll bring me up a drop o' tea." This was all he said.

"And, my dear," as Sarah told her neighbour, Mrs. Flobby, the next morning,— "with that he went upstairs all in a shiver like, and I put a good half-quartern of Old Tom into the pot along with the tea, and after he'd had two cups he went off like a lamb, an' he sleep like a haystack he did, till the bells was goin' for hearly service at St. Patrick's here close by. But not a word could I get out of Bob when he come to hisself, my dear—if you b'lieve me—as to where he'd a bin, or what he'd bin up to the night before. He was as close as wax, he was. 'Sarah,' he says, 'don't you be worritting yourself about me. I'm all right now, but I 'opes and prays,' he says, 'I shan't have such another turn as yesterday

again for one while. For when I come home last night,' he says, 'I felt like a hempty bladder blowed out with wind,' he says, 'you might a knocked me down with a shaving brush.' 'You was empty enough,' says I; 'but you had something I s'pose while you was out; where did you get your victuals, Winnecot?' For I wanted to know, you see, where he had bin to all them seven hours. 'I didn't 'ave no victuals,' he says quite short, 'but don't you worrit yourself about me.' And if you believe me, Mrs. Flobby, that's all I could get out of that man, little as he is."

And, indeed, that was all that the little man could then be got to say about his mysterious absence, and his return in such an abject and miserable condition. And so they were obliged to let the matter rest.



CHAPTER V.

INSPECTOR POLTER OF THE K DIVISION.

“ What is my offence ?
Where is the evidence that doth accuse me ? ”

SHAKSPEARE.

HE station-house of the K Division of the Police was in High Street, Barton Green ; and the Inspector's office was a small box cut off from an angle of the first room on the right, as you go down the passage. A poorly dressed but tidy woman had just asked to see the Inspector, made a short statement to him, and thereupon asked what she was to do.

“ What are you to do, my good woman ? Your master, you say, left home the day

before yesterday morning, as usual, and has never turned up since? Well, well, that's likely enough; it's getting quite common now for gents to disappear like, and frighten all their families into fits, and then in a week or two they turn up all safe and sound. You go straight home to Barton Manor House—I know it well—and most likely you'll find him taking his tea as quiet and natural as if he had never been outside the door."

"Oh! no he won't, sir," replied Sally Hill. "No, he won't be there; he ain't that kind of party, out for a spree. Nothing but business ever kep' 'im out all night, and then never more than till next mornin'. There's something wrong up."

She said this so earnestly, and with such a conviction of its being true, that Mr. Inspector Polter, of the K division, High Street, Barton Green, once more opened

the folio note-book on his desk, which he had just before shut, dipped his pen in the ink, and condescended to ask a question.

“Where was your master going when he left home?”

“To Barton’s Rents.”

“*Barton’s Rents!* Why didn’t you say so before; it’s one of the worst places in our beat. What was he going there for?”

“Getting in his rents.”

“How often did he go for his rents? every week?”

“Most times he did. But this week he’ve been twice, because you see some was behindhand; he said he *would* have the money this time, or out they should go.”

“You don’t know any of these behindhands by name, I suppose, missis?”

“Well, he did say somethin’ to old Wincot about one on ‘em—*Miky Sullivan*.”

“Sure of the name, missis?”

“Quite; and I heerd master say to Bob——”

“Bob—who is Bob? You said Winne-cot just now. Do be careful.”

“Well, so it is Winnecot; ain’t his first name Bob?”

“What! the little barber in Green Arbour Court here?”

“That’s him; he’s come to the house a shavin’ these twenty years and more, every morning.”

“Does Bob know anything of Mr. Hastings being missing?”

“Yes; but he didn’t see anything of master that morning, for he went away early without being shaved. Bob come the next morning as usual.”

“And what is your own name, my good woman?”

“Sally Hill.”

“Well, you go home, Sally, and be-

ready in case you should be wanted ; and keep up your spirits. No doubt we shall hear something of your master before night ; and you'll see him safe and sound to-morrow. He hadn't got any money with him, I suppose ?”

“ He never carried no money when he went out ; but perhaps he might a got some after his day's work was over.”

“ Good morning, Mrs. Hill, that will do for the present. We'll find him if he's above ground, depend upon it, and soon too.”

And with this feeble comfort the old woman wended her way mournfully back to the dreary Manor House.

The Inspector then called into his office a couple of his sharpest sergeants, set the whole case briefly before them, and charged them to set to work at once.

“ Do you know anything of Miky Sullivan ?”

“ Yes, sir, one o’ the worst of the whole lot in Barton’s Rents; most of ’em Irish, and most of ’em bricklayers. It took four men to get Mike to the station-house last week; he’d bin’ drunk two days, after whackin’ his wife, and was all for fighting.”

“ Well, then, go quietly to work, and see what Miky was about the day before yesterday; what he has been doing since, and where he is now. Divide the work between you. Keep apart, and yet work together. One of you take the day before yesterday, and one to-day. I shall expect to hear where Hastings is before night. You can have more men, of course, if you want them. This ought to be a good job.”

After this, the two sergeants set out presently on their day’s work; the one devoting himself to Mr. Michael Sullivan’s sayings and doings during the previous days, and the other to the present whereabouts of

Mr. Samuel Hastings. They both worked hard; as there seemed to be a fair chance of its being a good job, they both worked with a will. On comparing notes at 6 p.m. that evening, they had a long report to make to the Inspector, though not a satisfactory one. The substance of it was as follows.

Miky Sullivan and Jem Danks, the marine-store keeper, had both been seen much together on the day of old Hastings's visit. He had had many angry words with both (so said the other lodgers), and after an infinite amount of wrangling, and many sharp threats of the law being brought to bear on them if the rent was not forthcoming, he at last extracted from Miky a portion of the rent, and a promise to have the rest ready on the Saturday. Then the master of Barton Manor had gone on his way towards town, for the purpose, as it was thought, of getting in some more

behindhand rents from one or other of his back settlements; having set out in a storm of wind and rain, with his bag under his arm. Acting upon this information, the Sergeants had traced the old fellow a mile or two into London, as far as Ponder's Gardens, then with difficulty to a well known tramps' lodging-house there, and still later to an empty house in Turnstile Street, of which, and three adjoining houses, all empty, and all under the care of an old charwoman, Hastings was the landlord. He had gone there, after his usual fashion, to get a cheap night's lodging, and to be ready for work the next day.

Several witnesses, so said the sergeants, were ready to swear to this, and they knew the old man well.

“They swore this so plain and hard,” said Sergeant Dawson, “that I fetched my mate, and we both of us went to No. 15, Turnstile

Street, and a pretty old ramshackle place it was. A good sized, biggish, house, all black with dirt and grime these twenty years; the winders most of 'em broke; not a stroke o' paint."

"Never mind the paint," says Inspector Polter.

"Well, my mate and me knocked and knocked and knocked for a goodish time, and no answer could we get, though we did go at it hamner and tongs. Says I at last, I says, there's some game up here, for there's fresh mud on the doorstep, right up to the door; fresh since the rain, too, as if somebody had a went in in the wet. If we can't bust the front door—which it seems a padlocked inside—we must get in to the back, through the gardin."

"Get on, Dawson," says the Inspector again, "you're rather slow over it."

"Yes, sir, we was slow over it; for the

back door was as tight as the front, along of a couple of bolts and a padlock. But at last me and my mate broke open a closet window, and pops in, up the staircase, and there, just outside the door on the first landing, lays a poor old woman, all a doubled up, like a sack on the door mat; and pretty well done for she was, with her head broke in, and one arm all smashed to ribands. The door was wide open, and in we goes; there was poor old Sam Hastings a stretched out on the bed, all his clothes on, his pockets turned inside out, and his throat cut to that degree that the bed-clothes was steepled in it, and he a holdin' fast to his blue bag like a wice with one hand, and a bit of velveteen with the other. All the things a chucked about the room, and a razor on the floor, and a barber's white apron, name a marked in the corner R. W."

“How do you know it was a barber’s apron?”

“Pockets in front, sir, for combs and scissors, and two shaving cloths in the pockets ; and K 75 reports he saw little Bob Winnecot a coming through Titecomb Square—that’s close by—that very afternoon, about 6 P.M.”

“Anything more, Dawson?”

“No sir, nothin’ more, except that the old man had got this ‘ere piece o’ cloth with a button on it, clenched tight in one hand, and Jem Danks and Miky have both bin on the spree mostly since the day before yesterday, and just now are rather scarce.”

“They must be in hand, Dawson, in time for the magistrate to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, give me the piece of cloth and button ; now go down to Winnecot’s at Belton Street, get a clean face, and just look about you quietly. We shall want that little old man in the morning, the first

thing, that's clear; and tell No. 78 he must look to it, that Winnecot doesn't leave the shop to-night without being seen to. It's 78's beat, I think. I'll go down and see Mr. Beak myself, and have the warrant ready for the morning."

Then Mr. Inspector Polter ordered a Hansom to be called; jumped in, and drove down to Barton Rise, where Mr. Beak, the magistrate, had a private residence.

Old Bob Winnecot, still a good deal out of sorts, and with his hand rather shaky, duly lathered and shaved Sergeant Dawson late that evening. He was a favourite with most of the Force, was the old man, and enjoyed a chat with them as men in authority. That night, however, he did his work slowly, heavily, and with none of his usual gossip. A few words about the old man missing at the Manor House was all he *did* say. He was not

himself at all. In fact, he cut the Sergeant's left cheek, and boggled a good deal in getting a bit of nap to stick to the sore place.

"Why, you're down in the mouth, Bob, to-night, it seems. What's the matter with you? Is it you or your tools that's out of order?"

"He ain't hisself," says Sarah, from a corner where she sat stitching a front; "not at all hisself, and he ain't bin, either, this last two days, Mr. Sergeant."

"I'm sorry for that, ma'am," says the wily Dawson. "Now what is it? anything wrong in his insides? There's a heap o' new cholera cases, I'm told, up the court to-day. He ain't partial to plums, is he?"

"No, no," replies the lady. "Bless you, he ain't given to that style o' thing! he ain't a gorgin' man, isn't Winnecot. Thank goodness, it's not the dieria I 'opes; but he ain't hisself, this two days past; and so I says to Mrs. Flobby, No. 27; away for

hours upon hours, too, and he a married man, I says!"

"Oh, Bob," says the Sergeant quietly, turning his eye upon the married man as he stood strapping his razor on a leather strap fastened to the wall. "Oh! Bob, you're getting a sly bird, I'm afraid. Out for hours upon hours, eh?"

But to this Bob made no audible reply at first, and then rather slowly and sulkily, "Well, yes, I was out for hours, and I s'pose a man must go out and attend to his biz-ness, if his wife *'ave* got a longish tongue."

"Not to kip his poor wife a sitting up for 'im, late o' nights, though, Winnecot; and wonderin' what's become of her poor dear husband! I didn't know, for my part, there was much shaving went on after dark."

"Well," replies the barber, "it's a goodish bit after dark now, Sergeant, and shaving

ain't done yet, you see; and there's so many out of the Force that come in after their beat's over, and the Work'us job is allays arter supper."

" You've hit me there, Bob," answered Dawson, laughing heartily, and putting on his hat; " keep yourself quiet, man, and go to bed early. Good night; that's my advice."

At the corner of the street the Sergeant met K 78. " He's there all right," he whispered; " but there's something queer about the old barber, though I don't think he had any hand in the job. But keep it all dark, and look after your man."

" Well, Sarah," said the hapless Winne-cot, as he put up the last shutter that night, before retiring to rest, " I 'ope you've got your mind a little more easier, now as you've told all your sorrows to the Force. I shall be the talk of the neigh-

bourhood to-morrow, I shall. What a blessed thing it would be if females was a born without tongues!"

The only reply to this mild reproof was a torrent of tears, shed mainly over the person of Master Dick Wincicot (their youngest), who at that moment was trying to extract some little nourishment out of a blue-bag, which in his mother's distraction, he had caught up from a corner of the room.

"To think o' that, now," she added after a pause, "me that never opens my mouth for hours together—me!"

For the last two hours she had been pouring forth a continuous series of little nagging remarks at the culprit, as often as the shop was cleared of customers for a moment; but the torrent was all in vain. "It were as if he was made o' stone," said Sarah. Provoke him to answer she

could not. All he said was--once--after a long silence, "My dear, you'd make your fortin at frightenin' away birds, you would; a clackin' stick is nothin' to you, nothin'."

Soon after this the trio retired to bed, but two of them not, I fear, to rest; and for a long hour and more Winnecot had a bad time of it. The clacking stick was close at his ear now, and sharper than ever; and when broken sleep at last overtook him, it was troubled with visions of the Force, all waiting to be shaved, and of razors that would not cut.





CHAPTER VI.

WHO HAS DONE IT?

“Look in his face and say if guilt be there,
Or but the shadow of some sudden fear.”

PASSMORE.

OVER against No. 26, Belton Street, on the other side of the way, was the establishment of Mr. Oliah Slodger. He was a soft, pulpy, man, with a white face; a little Independent Baptist, and an undertaker in a small way. In his shop window, in front of some planks of elm, was exhibited a small coffin, about six inches long, lined with dingy white satin, and adorned with gilt nails, typifying what Oliah could, if

called upon, do for the final comfort and repose of the aristocracy who would go as high as *Twelve-fifteen*, for a sumptuous and gorgeous entombment. Mr. Slodger went over to Winnecot's every day, mostly before work began, "to get a tidy face, as was wanted in his profession, where looks was everything."

Breakfast was hardly over the next morning at 26, Belton Street, before eight o'clock, and little Bob Winnecot rather more like himself again, was called on to operate on the expansive chin of friendly Mr. Slodger; chatting meanwhile in his usual fashion with two other customers, who had also just dropped in. Sarah had been merciful to him at breakfast, after his black draught of the previous night, and with her youngest child in her arms was now busily superintending a small green-grocery department of the shop which ex-

tended through an open window, and over a section of the pavement. On a slanting board were arranged a dozen or two cadaverous looking bloaters, a few bunches of scrubby watercress, and a sieve or two of dingy potatoes; and at the foot of the slope a row of three shallow deal boxes thus labelled:—

EGGS, 16	FRESH EGGS, 12	OTHER EGGS, 24
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The idea of this ingenious division and labelling was due to their excellent friend Slodger, who argued very fairly as follows:

“If they wants *fresh eggs*, there they are 12 a shilling; if they like to take their chance we don’t say nothing against *eggs* at 16; and if they ain’t particular at all, why there they are *other eggs* at 24. So you can please all parties, Mrs. W.”

Slodger, after the manner of his kind, had been dealing out to his few but eager listeners the full details of the sudden decease of a neighbouring pork-butcher, from an attack of cholera on the previous evening; “and a werry handsome corpse he’ll make, I’m told.”

“ You see,” said Slodger, “ he was werry fond of his own country made sossidges, which he made ’em himself on the premises ; and his mother was uncommonly hearty at her meals, she sot long, she did — and his father——”

“ In the pork line, too, sir—wasn’t he ?” inquires Winnecot.

“ Yes, both of ’em the same perfession ; and his father, you see, he was werry quick over his meals,—and poor Dick, you see, he took after both his parients. Three pounds, I’ve heerd, he took for his regular allowance the

night before—he did—of them werry sossidges."

"Did he now?" said customer number two, whose turn came next—very slowly—"did he now?"

"A heavy man to go off his perch so suddint, Mr. Slodger?"

"Ah, you may say that—one minute here, and the next—"

At this moment a strange silence suddenly crept over the shop, and the busy gossip died out in a trice, as K 78, with a slip of paper in his hand, walked very quietly in, stepped up to the barber, tapped him on the shoulder, and whispered half-a-dozen words into his ear.

Whatever the words were, Winnecot, when he heard them, turned pale, but replied cheerily enough:

"All right, guv'nor, let me just finish off this bit o' whisker, and I'm your man."

Meanwhile, Sarah stood silent, in utter and speechless astonishment, at the shop-door. She was speechless, in fact, till her husband, having slowly wiped and put away his razor, took his hat down from the peg, and prepared to set out in obedience to 78's commands, then, at last, she could no longer keep quiet.

“O, good Lord, gentlemen,” she cried out, “what is he took for, and where to? O, gentlemen, if *you* please!”

All the old man himself said, very quietly, was—“Don't you worrit, Sarah; you look after the shop, and keep all straight till dinner-time. I shall be back afore then.”

“You needn't hold me,” he added to the officer; “I'll go quiet.”

And accordingly away the two went down Belton Street; some of the neighbours just coming out to the doors as they passed, to see who had been wanted at

No. 26; but seeming to feel little surprise or further care about the matter.

In ten minutes they were at the police-court; and as the clock struck eleven, Bob Winnecot stood in the dock in front of Mr. Beak, to hear and answer the charge brought against him.

Of what the charge really was, he had as yet heard nothing. All that K 78 replied to his inquiry had been, "You'll hear all about it before long." Nor, when they reached the police-court, was Mr. Inspector Polter inclined to be much more communicative. All he said was, "All right, my man; you had better say nothing now, Mr. Beak will be here before long and then will be your time to speak, and to ask any questions you like."

There were but few idlers in the court, for the list of night charges was a short one, and these being disposed of, Winnecot

was at once brought in, and the statement of the two sergeants (omitting all mention of the razor and apron) was substantially read over to him.

As the facts of the terrible murder were one by one recounted by the witnesses, the old man turned pale, and plainly trembled with emotion. But he made no comment until the dreary recital was finished, and then fixing his eyes on the presiding Magistrate, he called out in a low, troubled voice :—

“ O good Lord! good Lord! I allays said it would happen some day or other.”

“ What would happen?” inquired Mr. Beak, in a calm clear voice, as if he were merely asking the prisoner if the streets were muddy, or if the wind had changed to east. “ *What* would happen?”

“ Why that they’d be down upon him in one of his rounds.”

“Who would be down upon him, and what for?”

“Some of that roughish lot in Barton’s Rents, sir.”

“Did you ever know them threaten him?”

“Never.”

“Why did you think then, that this would happen some day?”

“Because of his money.”

“Did he carry much money about with him?”

“He never carried no money out with him; but I’ve know’d him bring fifteen or twenty pound home of a night.”

“And how did he carry it?”

“In a canvas bag, in his trousers pocket.”

“You have seen this yourself, my man, I suppose?”

“No, I never seen it myself, but I

knows it ; he's a told me of it many a time, this twenty year an' more, the next morning, when I come to shave 'im."

Then there was a pause for a few minutes. Mr. Beak leaned back in his comfortable, cushioned, seat of office, and looked steadily at the barber's face, as the buzzing whisper of the audience died out into deep silence, and one could easily hear the soft, measured tick of the clock above the Magistrate's head.

"Usher," said the calm voice, "let this man be sworn."

Bob was accordingly sworn, "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him God."

"May I ask one question afore it goes any further?" inquires the prisoner.

"Certainly."

"I should like to know why I was took

this mornin'; and what all this 'ave got to do with me."

"Quite right, my man, and you shall know directly. But before I tell you, look up this way and listen to what I have got to say to you. I hear from the inspector, Winnecot, that you are well known all round this neighbourhood, and bear a good character. Now, before I tell you why you are brought here, I am going to ask you a few questions; listen carefully, remember your oath, and answer me carefully. A great deal depends on your answers to these questions.

"Now, Winnecot, when did you last see Mr. Hastings?"

"Last Friday, sir."

"Sure that you have not seen him since?"

"Quite."

"Where did you see him?"

“When I went to shave 'im, at the Manor 'ouse, at the regular time.”

“You went every day—why did you not go on Saturday?”

“I did go.”

“Why did you not see him then?”

“He was gone before I come, and left word with Sally that he could not wait for me. It was them Sullivans that he was after.”

“You know he was after them; how did you know this?”

“He told me so hisself, the day before; and that Mike was pounds behindhand.”

“You thought then, it was likely he would have money that night?”

“If he could get it out o' Mike, I know'd he would.”

“Well, my man, you seem to be speaking fairly enough; now listen to my next question and speak out as truly—Where

did you go after leaving the Manor House on Saturday?"

"Straight home, sir, after a gossip with Sally."

"Sally! who is she?"

"Why, she've a bin servant there, man and boy, this forty year and more."

"Where next?"

"To Titcomb Square, No. 15; that's a reglar o' mine."

"A regular customer, you mean, I suppose. Well, where next?"

"To the Workus, which I always takes a Saturday hevening."

"And after the Workhouse?"

Up to this point the old man had answered every question most readily; without a moment's hesitation; but now he suddenly turned pale, and for a moment was silent.

Once more came the question, in the

same calm, clear voice: “ Well, my man, after the Workhouse, where next?”

“ That was my day’s work, that was; home then, o’ course.”

“ But you didn’t get home till nearly ten at night: you left the Workhouse, I find, at seven, that’s three hours. Where were you all those three hours?”

“ I’d rather not say, sir.”

“ But you must say, my man, or we shall have to find some way of making you. I warn you now, once more, that you had better speak out at once.”

This, however, was advice to which the old man seemed to turn a deaf ear. He was still silent, and apparently unwilling to speak.

“ Once more, Winnecot, only once—Where were you for those three hours?”

The old man rubbed his hands nervously together, looked very hard at Sergeant Dawson, but still made no reply whatever.

“Very well,” said Mr. Beak. “Officer, bring forward those things that were found last night.”

Whereupon, Dawson at once laid on the table before the bench a barber’s apron, soiled with the marks of dirty feet, and a few spots of blood, and a razor case, containing two razors, one of which was still deeply crusted with blackish stains both on blade and handle.

The razor and the apron were presently, by the Magistrate’s order, handed to the prisoner.

“Do you know that apron, Winnecot?”

“I could swear to that and the razors, anywhere, I’d take my ‘solomon david.’”

“Never mind your solemn affidavit, my man; you are on your oath, already. They are yours, are they? and you own them?”

“Yes, I do own ‘em, the whole lot.”

“They were picked up last night, prisoner,

on the floor of the room at 15, Turnstile Street, where the murdered man was found with his throat cut. How did they get there?"

"That's more than I can tell, sir, if I talks on till Christmas-day."

"O Lord!" he cried out, in amazement, after a moment's pause, — "I never took 'em there, that I'll swear to, anyhow."

"But who is to tell if you cannot?" inquires the stern voice of Mr. Beak. "They are your property, and are found close to the bed of the murdered man. Did you give them to him, or how did they get there?"

To this inquiry, as before, the prisoner's only answer was a stubborn silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Beak, "remove the prisoner. I remand him till eleven to-

morrow morning. By that time, perhaps, he will have come to his senses."

But these terrible words brought the wretched little man to his senses at once.

"Sir," he cried out in a sudden panic, "let me speak now. I'll tell all I knows."

Mr. Beak resumed his seat; and then slowly, bit by bit, the following string of facts was elicited from the still reluctant prisoner.

He had gone to Titcomb Square, as before stated, thence to the Workhouse; and after that was on his way home through one of the back streets, when a man walking in front of him suddenly stooped and picked up a purse from the pavement, and immediately asked him—Winnecot—to go halves. This Winnecot at first declined; but at last was persuaded to go into a public-house with his unknown friend, and

drink to his health in a glass of rum-and-water. Glass the first was followed by glass the second, and that by another ; after which the miserable old man owned, with tears in his eyes, that he had no notion at all of what took place. “He had eat no wictuals all day,” he said, “and the rum was too many for him. He got somehow into a crowd of chaps in a back slum, his bag, razors and all, was snatched away, his hat knocked all to bits, his pockets turned inside out, and his clothes covered with muck;” and all he knew further was that St. Patrick’s was a striking nine-thirty just as he at last got to the corner of Belton Street.

Mr. Beak looked very grave and rather incredulous, as he heard this story.

“Did you know any of the fellows who robbed you? Could you swear to any one of them, if you saw him again?”

“I could swear to Miky Sullivan’s face; least ways, I thinks so.”

“Thinking so is not of much use; but, did you tell this to the first policeman you met?”

“Tell a Bobby?” said the prisoner, “where could ever the likes o’ me find a Bobby, sir? Bless your honour, Bobbies always kips out of sich rows as this, till they’re all over, and somebody’s wanted. I never see one Bobby all the blessed way home, as I knows of.”

“Did you tell your wife, then, when you got home?”

“Well, no, I can’t say I did; you see, sir, she is a werry orkard female to deal with, is my Sarah. If I’d a let her know that I ’ad bin bamboozled into a public ’ouse, and arter that bin bonneted, ’ad my pockets turned out, and my bag tore out o’ my ’ands, I shouldn’t ’ave ’ad a day’s peace for weeks to come.”

“ You never mentioned this affair to a policeman, or told your wife when you got home,” said patient Mr. Beak, willing to give him another chance. “ Did you tell any one else, any friend, or neighbour, since that Saturday night? Think now.”

But in reply to this inquiry, the little Barber, now thoroughly alarmed, could do nothing but repeat his former statement. He had seen no policeman, he had told no one at home, and not one among his neighbours. “ Sarah,” he added, “ could swear that he come home covered with mud, and his pockets hempty.”

“ It is very unfortunate for you, Robert Winnecot, that you did not tell what had happened to some one or other of your acquaintance. Your story of being robbed and ill treated may be all true, or all false. At any rate, I cannot undertake to believe it as now laid before me; and until

I know something more as to how your bag and razors got into that room we cannot part with you. Prisoner, you are remanded until to-morrow, at eleven."

"Remove him. He may see his friends."

"Polter," said the Magistrate, "you had better telegraph at once to all the London Stations, that a velveteen coat is wanted for that button."

"Yes, sir."

That night there was deep lamentation at 26, Belton Street; but about seven in the evening, having shut up the shop, with Master Dick in her arms unhappy Sarah presented herself at the station-house, and had a short and very watery interview with the prisoner.

But Bob bore it bravely, and it was over at last. He still charged his wife, "not to worrit, as it would all come right"—kissed

his little son Dick, but broke down in saying good-night, into a flood of childish tears.

The next morning the solemn lamentations in Belton Street were deeper than ever. In *The Daily Tearer* the “orkard female to deal with,” read a full and graphic account of what had taken place before Mr. Beak on the previous day. The paragraph was intended to be highly sensational, and was headed “The Adventures of a Barber.”

As she rocked herself to and fro in her paroxysms of grief, she murmured to herself—“I’m an orkard female, am I! O dear, O dear!”



CHAPTER VII.

MIKY SULLIVAN IS WANTED.

“ Wanted is he?
Then, let them seek and search,
If he be worth the finding.”

FENTON.

HE inquest followed quickly upon the Magistrate's examination; and without much difficulty a verdict was soon returned, of “ *Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.*” Then after one or two more remands from day to day, and the production of a few more elaborate trifles of evidence by the police, the poor little barber was released; having found good

and substantial bail for his appearance if again wanted. He had stuck manfully to his first story of having been half-garrotted and robbed of his money and shaving bag; and no less closely and truthfully to his first statement that he knew nothing whatever of the murder, nor how his apron and razors ever got into the room of the murdered man.

The police still looked at him with hungry eyes; but could say nothing against him. They frequented his shop much as usual, at nights, though they paid pretty dearly for their audacity; Bob's hand having taken up an odd trick of getting shaky as it passed over the delicate corners of chin and cheek, and inflicting a sharp touch of cold steel.

“I don't know how it is, sergeant,” he would say, “but whenever one of the force comes in, I'm all of a quandary like, and

as sure as fate I gives 'em a nick, just where there's a pimple, or a scrubly place. 'Tis queer, ain't it, sergeant? my 'and 'as never bin right ever since them two nights in the station."

But when the sergeant was gone, he would say to his wife with a quiet twinkle in his eye,—

“Sarah, I don't think I shall ever give one o' them chaps a clean face again, without my razor somehow making a mess of it.”

To which came the invariable reply—

“O, Bob, whatever you do, don't have no secrets agin, tho' 'tis from a horkard female, and me a lone woman with three blessed children.”

After which little passage of arms there would come a short interval of peaceful calm, until the arrival of the next customer.

The old man's state of rapture, when he had at last make his escape from Mr. Beak's tender mercies, and once more returned to Belton Street, had been almost too much for him. For his final examination had been a very brief one, and his release sudden, so that he took his disconsolate wife and children altogether unawares. As he entered the well-known little shop (still available during his absence for hair-cutting), he had caught up little Dick from his usual crawling voyage on the floor, and before she was fairly aware of his presence had inflicted a hearty kiss on the lips of Sarah, who with very watery eyes and shaky fingers, was trying to stitch a front, in her usual corner.

Then the other two children had rushed out upon him from the little parlour behind the shop, and after being nearly smothered with kisses from them, and driven crazy

with questions from their mother; the old man was glad to sit down in the regular shaving arm-chair, and try to look unconcerned before the arrival of the next customer. But, it was very hard to keep still, and in another moment he was at his usual place by the fireside, strapping a razor with all his might, as if he had never left the old shop for a day. Then by degrees his mind grew calmer; he got once more inured to the sound of Sarah's voice, to the cries of children in the neighbouring gutter, and the wiry song of two canaries in the dingy window of his old friend Slodger across the road. And so he glided slowly back into his old life, and then began to wake up not only to the sense of his own safety, but to the miserable and bloody death of his old master at Barton Manor House. For many a long month this haunted him, night and day. Meanwhile,

Miky Sullivan and Jem Danks were both wanted, but neither was to be found.

The full details of the coroner's inquest had appeared in all the daily papers, the verdict was known far and wide through London, and the police, sanguine of profession as usual, loudly declared that the real criminals would be in the hands of justice forthwith.

The Daily Tearer was Mr. Thorn's paper, so that the terrible news was at once known at Barton Villa, and there formed the subject of many a discussion and dialogue, of which there is no need to notice more than a few words that befell on the first morning.

“One thing is quite clear,” said the lawyer, “as he finished reading the column in *The Daily Tearer* to his wife and daughter. “One thing is quite clear—I must write to those two unhappy boys at

school. Luckily I have their address; and whatever the *Will* is, they must leave school now and come up at all events to their father's funeral.

Then he added to his wife, after a moment's pause, "As soon as my letters are despatched, I must be off to the Manor House, so that I shall not be at home till late. Dinner at Seven."

Then Mr. Thorn went down into his study, and worked steadily with pen and ink for an hour; one of his letters being addressed to "Antony Hastings, Esq., Cogsford House, Cogsford, Lincolnshire." Having put them into the hall letter-box, he set off at once to the Manor House; and there found poor old Sally Hill sitting by the kitchen fire in a state of utter and uncontrollable lamentation. The old woman was alone in the house, and doubly alone in the dingy kitchen. But

at the sound of the lawyer's steps as he entered the door, she suddenly started up, and cried out—

“O^h sir, is there any news of the ruffians that done it?”

“None, Sally, that I know of, but the police are hard at work, and say they are sure of them before the week's out. So make your mind easy.”

“I only wish I 'ad the hangin' of 'em, sir.”

“I wish you had, Sally; though hanging is much too good for them—much too good. But, Sally, this bitter weather you ought to allow yourself a morsel more fire in the grate than this wretched scrap. You are dying of cold, here. Come along upstairs with me, and bring some wood with you to light up a good fire in the master's room. I have to look round, and just seal up all the drawers and cup-

boards till the young masters come home."

"*Fire upstairs?*" inquired the old woman. "He never allowed two fires a goin' at the same time. I only kep mine a burnin' such times as the master was out on his day's tramp. I couldn't do it, sir, that I couldn't. The sticks wouldn't light."

"Oh yes they would, Sally. Hand them over to me now, while you go and get a shovelful of coals; and we will have a good fire in a twinkle. I have a deal to talk about, and you will have your hands full enough of work to-night, getting ready for Mr. Antony and Gerald."

There was no standing against such an appeal as this. So in a few minutes a good fire was blazing in the old miser's desolate grate; such a fire as had not burned in it for many a long year.

Mr. Thorn had a shrewd brain, and a

keen eye. By looking carefully about, he soon found that not a single scrap of paper, or any other like property, had been left out by the master on his last fatal exit from the house; and a question or two to the old woman convinced him that everything of value was under lock and key.

“He never left nothin’ about, he didn’t, no, not so much as a ha’porth o’ paper, nor a farden o’ money. He paid all the bills hisself every week, and knowed to a stiver what everythink cost. Coals was the on’y thing he didn’t keep under lock and key. ‘They can’t eat the coals,’ he says, ‘and I know you won’t burn, ‘em Sally;’ and as for wood, one bundle a week was the werry outside of it.”

“Well, well, Sally,” replies the Lawyer, “now come here and look at me while I seal up all these drawers and cupboards. In a

couple of days, no doubt, both the young men will be here; and till they come with me, nobody must touch anything in this room or house. I can trust you, I know. Meanwhile, get a charwoman in to help you, and you two set to work and clear out this room; bring down a chair or two from upstairs, and get ready a couple of bedrooms. If you want more money for anything, come to me; meanwhile there's a couple of pounds for you. So set to work at once. Open the windows, air the beds, and make up good fires everywhere. I shall look in again to-morrow."

Having thus roused the old woman into new life again with the idea of work—and work for a Hastings—Mr. Thorn, having warmed his hands cheerily at the crackling fire, put on his hat, and made his way into Lincoln's Inn as fast as a cab would take him.

All this time, I regret to say, my hero is waiting to make his appearance on the stage, as my readers no doubt think that he ought long ago to have done; and, I confess, not without good reason. But I must still beg their indulgence for a little while longer, and try to clear the stage a little more for him, before he and his brother come up from Lincolnshire where they still are, little knowing of the letter already on its way to greet them on the coming morrow.

I began this chapter by saying that Miky Sullivan was wanted; and he and his companion were still wanted for many an ensuing day, until the murder of Sam Hastings, the miser of Barton Manor, was entirely blotted out by a fresh and more horrible tragedy in Shoreditch. All therefore that has to be told of this matter, had better be told at once, and as briefly as

may be. At last, then, as all interest in the murder had begun to die away, a short paragraph appeared in the Evening papers, saying that the two notorious criminals for whom the police had been so long on the look out, had been both captured at a Thieves' Kitchen in Whitechapel; that Danks wore a velveteen coat, which had been recently mended at the back, and both would be brought before the Magistrate the next morning. But the next morning, alas! only proved that the newspaper report was little better than pure fiction. The velveteen coat was of the wrong colour; and not a tittle of evidence could be brought against either man that he had any hand in the murder, or in the assault upon the barber. Winnecot, when brought into court, was unable to swear positively to either of them. All he could say was that he thought they were among

the mob of ruffians who set on him, but he was not able to identify them. After some further examination, Mr. Sullivan coolly admitted that he was among the crowd, but had nothing to do with the assault. No money was found upon him or his companion, nor any of the dead man's property, and both prisoners wound up by also freely admitting that they had got out of the way when they heard that the police were after them.

Mr. Beak, therefore, had no alternative but to release both the accused; much to the chagrin of the police, and the indignation of *The Daily Tearer*, which asserted fiercely the next morning that "The fountain of justice in England was no longer clear and untarnished as it had once been; that the strong arm of the law had become weak, and its officers a mockery and a sham."

A month later, a notorious East-end burglar, well-known as "Tom the Dustman," was triumphantly brought before Mr. Beak, and charged with having a hand in the double murder which had so long defied the K division to unravel. Both buttons were now found to be wanting at the back of his velveteen coat, but alas! beyond all doubt that coat had never been cut or torn, and therefore not mended. The Dustman was proved to have been professionally and profitably engaged in several neat burglaries in the immediate neighbourhood of Barton Green during previous years; and more than suspected of having had something to do with a still neater case of recent garotting; and, besides, he was a friend of Jem Danks and Sullivan. But beyond this, not a grain of available evidence was to be had; and the Dustman was released, as his "pals" had

been, with a strong caution from Mr. Beak, and many black looks from Mr. Inspector Polter.

The detective police were once more at fault; the K division at Barton Green had exhausted all their resources; Inspector Polter, who always came to 26, Belton Street for a clean face on Saturday evenings, maintained a stony silence when the subject of Miky Sullivan turned up; and the murder of old Sam Hastings the miser drifted slowly away into the great cloud of undetected crime in Babylon. Year after year that mighty cloud increases in magnitude and in horror, one more iota to the the huge darkness could matter little.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

“ Bound fast by name and blow, yet wide apart
The two appeared ; and yet were brothers.”

HARPER’S QUEST.

OUR scene changes abruptly, from the smoky domains of London, to the quiet, green fields of Lincolnshire. Everyone, in these fast days, knows the quiet village of Cogsford, so there is no need to describe its exact situation. A hundred years ago it was in the midst of a dreary waste of fen country. Now it is in the heart of fair green meadows, meadows dotted and fringed with goodly trees; rather flat, yet

still broken into pleasant outlines by two or three winding streams, and abundance of leafy hedgerows. The village itself, mostly of small cottages, is scattered in irregular patches on either side of a long winding main street, and crowned by the grey tower of the church. Here and there, half a mile off, lie some half-dozen snug farm-houses, shut in by rich pasture lands, and showing many quiet signs of wealth and comfort. Altogether, Cogsford numbers some twelve hundred inhabitants, and can boast of a Mechanics' Institute, a resident engineer, Mr. Tom Driver, a great friend and ally of one Gerald Hastings; a Doctor, and a Lawyer, who by the way does most of his work at Boston, the noble tower of which thriving town you can with a good glass make out above the trees on the furthest edge of the horizon. But law is looked upon as an expensive luxury,

and the professor has an idle time of it so far as Cogsford is concerned.

Cogsford House, the residence of Mr. Limber the schoolmaster, is situated at the extreme end of the village, just where the sluggish waters of the canal take a curve away to the right among the green hedge-rows, and not far from Digby Wood and its famous covert for foxes. There is a path along by the side of the river, and though the morning air is cold and uninviting as yet, two young men are just now sauntering idly along that path, and talking as if they really had something to say. The shorter of the two is Antony Hastings, a sturdy, thickset, well-made youth, with a broad manly face, and white well-formed teeth, a kindly and yet hard expression, yet perhaps with more of the skin of the bear than Bruin's temper. Gerald, the younger brother walking by his side, is clearly more

refined and delicate in look, with thin sensitive nostrils, bright brown eyes, and a curly wave in his rather reddish hair; shy and diffident at first, yet with strong tenacity of purpose stamped on every feature. Pliant, yet self-willed, easily led, but not to be driven. Terribly resolute when once he has made up his mind; and yet to be touched by a single kindly word or look of love.

Brothers, as a rule, rarely waste much love on each other; and until cast headlong out into the battle of life, where their lines of thought and interest diverge, are often little more than friends, unless God has gifted both with the blessing of pure unselfishness. But years of isolation had done much for these two young men, and common suffering had drawn them closer together than they would otherwise have been; and though the channels of thought,

action, and interest, were to both, as yet, much alike and often identical, they really had a true regard for each other.

“Where is your letter from, Tony? Don’t rush on at such an awful pace. There’s an hour before the dinner bell rings yet, and plenty of time for a good stretch.”

“By Jove, I had forgotten I had a letter all this time. I saw old Limber’s eyes on the watch, the moment I took it up at breakfast, and so I slipped it into my pocket at once. Here it is—Post-mark, Barton Green—strange handwriting, and black seal. It’s not the Lord of the Manor’s hand, unless he has been taking lessons in his old age, and there is no one else to write.”

“Open it, man, open it,” said Gerald; “any news is good in this wilderness of a place.”

“Gerald my young friend,” replies the

elder of the two, mimicking old Limber's voice and manner—"my young friend, do not be impatient; as soon as my pipe is fairly alight, I will open and expound to thee."

The pipe was soon lighted, the letter torn hastily open, and as they sauntered on by the river side, Tony began to read to himself. Suddenly he cried out—

"Good God, Jerry, the old man is dead!"

And then, in breathless silence, the two read as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,

"You will be surprised and shocked to receive this letter from one who can scarcely be known to you more than by name; but not more surprised or shocked than I am grieved to have such sad tidings to communicate. As far as I am aware, you have no relations whose special

duty it would have been to discharge the office which now devolves upon me; and I —having been but recently appointed guardian to yourself and your brother, Mr. Gerald Hastings, in case of your father's death—suddenly find myself called upon to act. The full particulars of his death I hope to communicate to you in person very shortly; but I must add that it was both sudden and terrible.

“I enclose notes to the value of £10, (ten pounds), to defray the expenses of your journey, and beg that you will lose no time in explaining to the gentleman under whose care you now are, the cause of your sudden summons to London, and for coming direct to my house before proceeding to Barton Manor.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ J. THORN.

“ To Antony Hastings, Esq., &c.”

For a moment or two after they had finished, not a word was said. Tony still held the letter in his hand, and was looking steadily and firmly down at the river as it flowed slowly past, with unmoved face. Gerald had turned away from his brother, and gazing dreamily at the horizon, was calling up dim visions of home at the old Manor House, and of the last time he had seen his father. Insensibly his eyes filled with tears; and though he spoke not a single word, he was deeply moved. The meaning of the words Father and Home they had scarcely ever known. Both had been ruled over for years by a hard ruler, by his express will banished from home, and placed in the hands of a rough country schoolmaster, who, though he taught the Eton grammar well, had little else to recommend him. Both had longed earnestly for freedom, and had determined to have it at any cost.

Now it was theirs without a struggle. They would be in London the next day, absolutely free. So suddenly had it befallen them, that for a moment the chains seemed tighter than before.

“ We had better turn back, Gerald, and tell Limber at once. He will be in an awful state of mind, of course ; but I shall start by the first train in the morning, if not to-night.”

“ How many years is it, Tony, since we saw the old man ?”

“ Oh ! more than I can count, a whole age ; and I believe he thought he was never going to die, at least, old Sally told me so, many and many a time. Do you remember *her* ? and the barber, the little old fashioned beggar in the shiny black coat ?”

But Gerald made no answer, and again they walked on in silence.

“ I say, Gerald,” continued the same

hard, clear voice, “whatever the Will is, I promise you you shall have a fair share; and he must have made a will, I suppose. If not, there will be a pretty kettle of fish; though I never heard of a single living relation. Uncle Jack’s son was the last of them, and he enlisted and died of the yellow fever, years and years ago, before we got sent down into this lonely hole of a place.” And then, after a pause—“Never mind, Gerald, never mind; it’s all over now. We shall both be well off, that’s one blessing.”

“Yes, yes, Tony—but, for mercy’s sake don’t let us begin about the question of money—at least till the old man is quietly in his grave.”

“What will your friend Tom Driver say, Gerald, when he hears this news? Shall you tell him?”

“No, I shall write from town, I think.

There is no time to call now, and bad news is sure to fly fast enough."

" Anyhow, there's an end to all your notions of being an engineer's clerk, in this miserable wilderness. By Jove, we shall be in London by this time to-morrow."

There was little more said after this, and in ten minutes they had reached Cogsford House, where, to Mr. Limber's utter amazement, they laid before him the lawyer's letter. This opened the schoolmaster's eyes in a trice, and he saw at a glance that his reign was at an end; that the two brothers had ceased to be school-boys and become men. He acted accordingly. Every facility was offered for their immediate departure. A fly was hired to catch the express train, and in less than two hours they were on their way to town.

" As soon as affairs are settled, Mr. Limber," said Antony, " I will write to you

from Barton Manor. Now, Gerald, come along."

With these words the pupils and their schoolmaster parted. Bondage was over, freedom was to begin.

As the train speeds on swift wings to London we must outstrip it, and see what is going on at Barton Villa, where the arrival of the young travellers was hourly expected.

Mrs. and Miss Thorn sat at work in a small inner drawing-room, from the window of which one could get a glance over the neighbouring meadows behind the house. But it was now quite dusk, and the crimson curtains were drawn; the fire crackled pleasantly and brightly in the grate, and cast little glowing touches of light on the book-cases which lined the room, along the floor, as well as on some bright and pretty nick-nacks on the tables. It was a quiet

and dainty room, everywhere showing trace of womanly care and taste. The two ladies were dressed for dinner, and in all respects ready to entertain the two stranger guests as soon as they arrived. The elder lady was devoting herself, heart and soul, to crochet; the younger, with far less ardour, to the mysteries of tatting.

“I hope they will not come before papa arrives.”

“That wont matter much, mamma; but it is uncertain whether they will come to-day at all. All papa knew was, that they would get his letter this morning—telling them what had happened, and begging them to come here, if possible, for to-night. They may not come till to-morrow, after all. And it doesn’t matter much, as I said.”

“Yes, my dear, I think it matters a great deal, when you remember that they are

both strangers to us, and both here not under the pleasantest of circumstances. Your father is the proper person to introduce them to us."

"Oh! I remember them both pretty well."

"My dear Amy, how can you!—they were boys then—mere boys. They are young men now."

"Barely, mamma, barely. And boys just turned young men are more easily amused and managed than mere youngsters fresh from school. They will be as sober, well-behaved, and demure as a couple of parlour-boarders on leave-day."

"But, my dear child, I tell you that they are young men, not boys."

"So much the better; one young lady is quite able to entertain two young men. I can talk to one about the beauties of Milton, and the other I must

flirt a little with, and make his brother jealous."

At this moment came a ring at the gate, then a well known step in the hall, and then a well known face at the door, just as Mrs. Thorn was exclaiming—

"Don't forget, Amy, I beg, the mournful occasion that has called them to London—when you talk of flirting."

"The very best thing she can do, my dear," says the master of the house; "in moderation, of course—in moderation. I hardly know what the youngsters will be like, but it's sad news I have to tell them—and there's the funeral only two days off; so that a cheery word or two, and a pair of bright eyes to shine on them, will be welcome enough. The news I shall not tell them until after dinner."

"Papa always takes your part, Amy; but, John my dear, do go and dress at

once, or they will surely be here before you are ready."

So Mr. Thorn went to dress, and crochet and tatting once more reigned supreme.

He had scarcely returned to the drawing-room, when a cab drew up at the gate, and the travellers were announced. Strange to say, both seemed quite at home, and perfectly at ease ; chatting freely till the first bell rang, and then going up to their room as naturally as if their habit for years.

"I have put you both into one room," said their host, going before them ; "you don't fight much, I suppose."

"Not by night," replied Tony : "and after a good dinner we are the best of friends—are we not, Gerald?"

"Well, you shall have a slice of mutton and a glass of good sherry ; more I cannot promise you. The second bell sounds in

ten minutes; meanwhile, ring for what you want."

"My dear Amy," said the little lawyer, when he got back to the drawing-room, "there is no shyness in this case. The country schoolmaster, whoever he is, has taught them something more than the Eton Grammar: which, by the way, tells us that *to have learned the liberal arts softens men's manners*. They are both as calm and self-possessed as if they had been staying in the house for months. But then—the old father himself was a gentleman by birth and education. What's bred in the bone will show itself in the flesh."

"And in the spirit, too, papa. The short-set, little, one looks as if he would rather pay tenpence than tenpence-half-penny, a hundred times over."

"Why, you extravagant child, so would I; a penny saved—"

“Hush, papa! here they come.”

Presently, the second bell rang: but before Mrs. Thorn could settle the order of going downstairs, her daughter had taken the matter out of her hands entirely.

“You cannot both take me down to dinner,” she said brightly to Gerald, “as I see you are both intent on doing; so I must take you—and please to remember that the stairs are narrow, and my dress is not to be trodden on.” Then she quietly took the arm of either gentleman, and looking demurely at her father, said—“Now, papa, Darby and Joan first; we children will follow.”

“You see, Mr. Hastings,” said the lawyer, as they took their places at a round table, “what a wicked, impudent, little puss this daughter of mine is. I shall have to send her to school again.”

“Not into Lincolnshire, then, I hope,”

gallantly replies Antony. “A wilderness like that is not the place for such a flower

“to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

Amy was sitting opposite to the two young men, but at this she looked up and glanced demurely across the table at the speaker.

“No young lady ever blushes now: but I see you are as fond of poetry as ever, Mr. Antony. Is that a bit of your favourite Milton?”

“Milton a favourite of mine?—you are altogether out of your reckoning there. Old Limber used to give us his Impositions out of Milton and the Book of Proverbs—and both are my abomination to this very hour. But,” he added, “you know Gray from Milton as well as I do.”

“Pray don’t tax me with knowing anything, especially of such high art as Miltonic poetry. I don’t attend one of the ladies’ colleges, you know, and at my school we were only taught our A B C, the Battle of Prague, Mangnall’s Questions, the Catechism, and to keep our nails clean. The only scrap of Milton I remember is one beginning—

‘Sweet is the breath of morn——’

But is it Milton after all?” she added.

This allusion, however, to his boyish mistake passed utterly unnoticed by Antony, who quietly replied, “I never heard the line before in my life that I know of. You must ask Gerald here, if you want chapter and verse.”

But Gerald was far too busy in watching the merry play of the bright and pleasant face opposite to him, to be prepared with

any such chapter or any such verse, and answered rather at random—

“The morn is up again, the dewy morn——?”

“Surely that is Byron’s?”

“Now, Amy,” interrupted the host, “pray let our friends eat their morsel of fish in peace, without a word more sauce from Milton or Byron. Nothing is so bad for digestion as blank verse; let us have a good riddle if you like, but no more Milton.”

Then followed an interlude of Conundrums; a scrap or two from *Punch*, and a good legal story from Mr. Thorn’s ample budget, by which time dessert was on the table, and the whole party seemed to be on the best possible terms with each other. After ten minutes more of pleasant chat, the ladies withdrew, and Mr. Thorn had to break to his young guests the terrible

news of their father's death, which, in spite of their entreaties he had resolutely declined to tell until after dinner. He told the sad story as briefly and simply as he could, and they listened in almost silent amazement.

"It was useless," he added, "to pain you with all this in a letter, and make what is horrible enough even more terrible in black and white; and so, my young friends, I thought it better to bring you up to my house, that after a glass of wine and a rest you might hear it from a friend, who could get nearer to you than pens and ink."

And, then, he shook hands heartily with both.

"I am not much of a wine-drinker, but you two youngsters must now make yourselves quite at home, and sit here and chat over the fire by yourselves, or go up-stairs,

just as you like best. There will be coffee in half-an-hour." And with these words, he left them to their own devices.

The news had indeed fallen on them like a thunderbolt, for newspapers were luxuries in which Mr. Limber alone indulged at Cogsford House, and it so chanced that *The Daily Tearer* which they had bought at the station on their way to town, contained no allusion to the murder. But it affected them both very differently. Antony was at first all agog to offer fresh rewards for the discovery of the murderers. "Could nothing more be done? The old man had money with him, could not that be traced? Would it be of any use to see the Inspector or to call on Mr. Beak?" These, and a dozen other such questions, he urged afterwards on the lawyer, and now on his brother, with great vehemence; but being answered in the negative on every point, he gradually grew more

composed, and praised the coffee. Gerald, on the other hand, expressed a strong wish to see his father's face again, if possible, before the funeral, and was for setting out at once.

“I can't bear the idea,” he said to Tony, “of the old man's being buried without having a glimpse of him once more. He was our father, after all.”

“Yes, he was, Jerry; but he might just as well have been no relation at all. I don't remember a kind word from him for these dozen years past, if he ever said one before. He gave me a penny once, that I recollect; just before he sent us off into Lincolnshire, and charged me to take good care of it.”

“‘There,’ he said, ‘Tony, that's for taking such care of your books at school. Books are very expensive things; be careful, my boy, of all your books and clothes.

Clothes are horribly expensive. I only wish your brother Gerald was as careful as you are of them.' Thorn is far more like a father than ever *he* was."

"Yes, Tony; but after all he was our father, and if he pinched us, he pinched himself."

"And thank God the pinching is come to an end now. I shall be glad when the funeral is over too. Old Thorn knows all about the will, I dare say. By Jove! I shouldn't mind spending even 100*l.* to find out who the blackguards were. Suppose we go up and have some coffee."

And so up they went to the little drawing-room, where Antony at once began to discuss the question of further rewards with the lawyer.

"If you ask my advice," said the old man, "I should say, enough has been offered. I named a hundred, as your

Guardian, and the government added another hundred, and they have been working as hard as they will ever work, I imagine. There will be expenses enough, I dare say, about the trial and old Winnecot in which you must help; and then, there is the funeral."

" You are quite right, Mr. Thorn, no doubt. Pray don't think that I want to waste money; no, no, I think they ought to find the scoundrels without any reward at all; especially as there are other expenses. The funeral, I suppose, will not cost much? He would not have cared to spend much on such things, and one would like to do what would have pleased *him* best, you know. I should say—quite plain, the plainer and quieter the better."

Then Gerald spoke to Mr. Thorn of his desire to see the old man's face again, if practicable.

“Quite practicable, if you decide on doing so. But on the whole, I should strongly advise you not to indulge your wish, though it is a most natural one. The whole affair is so terrible and so full of sad associations, that the sight will be to you more of pain than pleasure, I am convinced. The inquest is over now, and the body lies at the Manor House. But you will do well, I think, not to go there till the funeral.”

And, so, it was settled.

Then they had a little music from Amy, who played with considerable skill and execution; but with no great amount of passion. Her heart was not really in it, and so the musician never went beyond decided clearness and correctness of style, and faultless time. It was good of its kind, but the kind was not that which touches the heart both of player and

listener, and turns the notes into living words of joy, or sorrow, or tender pathos.

It was impossible to help praising it, though the performer seemed utterly unconscious of any merit on her own part, beyond that of having learnt to master so many pages of Mendelssohn or Mozart.

“Music of this kind,” she would say, “calms me, and turns away my thoughts from trifling worries of life, and I am glad to see that you are patient—or at all events, polite—enough to endure my performance.”

But after chatting awhile with Gerald, she found out that he could play chess, and play well. In a few minutes they were deep in a game that called up a gleam of bright intelligence in every feature of her face; and a single glance showed the spec-

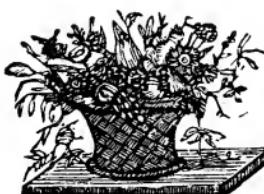
tator that heart and mind were now fully roused, and at work which she understood and loved. It was a tough battle, but the victory was hers at last, though she declared her antagonist well deserved it for the skill and patience of his defence.

“ You see, papa, Mr. Gerald in reality beat me many moves back; but at the very crisis of the game he made one trifling oversight, which gave me the chance. I really am proud to have beaten him.”

And her eyes flashed as she spoke, with a sparkle of genuine enthusiasm. As for Gerald himself, the grace and beauty of the girl’s face, and her words of hearty praise, completely charmed him. It would be delightful, he thought, to be beaten by such an opponent every night.

So passed the first evening in town,

which we have glanced at thus fully, because it was the type of many such evenings during the succeeding months; months which sowed many of the seeds in our hero's career, and bore lasting and abundant fruit.





CHAPTER IX.

THE WILL.

“ Of all who flocked to swell or see the show,
Who cared about the corpse ? The funeral
Made the attraction, and the black the woe ;
There throbbed not there one heart that pierced the pall.”

BYRON.

YES, there was *one* heart at the funeral of Samuel Hastings of Barton Manor that really felt deep grief for the murdered man, and that was the heart of old Sally Hill. She had been forty years in the service of the family, and loved the old man, miser as he was, with that loving affection now so rarely found between master and servant.

Mr. Thorn had taken her in the mourning carriage with himself, the other sable vehicle being occupied by the two sons ; and as the last handful of earth dropped with grating rattle on the coffin, the tears that fell from her eyes were those of deep, passionate, sorrow. Antony played his part as in a mournful ceremony to which mere duty called him—Gerald, as if touched with a wild and weary sadness, not like that of a son mourning for a father, yet not to be measured by depth of crape, or represented by sable trappings.

The funeral, of the plainest, simplest kind, took place in the cemetery at Barton Green, and, the cause of death being so notorious, was attended by a large crowd of idle spectators—not a few of them coming from Barton's Rents. To Gerald, indeed, it seemed more like a holiday show than a funeral, and he was most thankful when

the final solemn words were said, the crowd slowly broke up, and the heavy carriage at last set them down at the door of the Manor House. Desolate and forlorn as the idea of the place had always remained in the thoughts of the young men, the reality was even more desolate than they had pictured it. The neglected, weed-grown paths: the gloomy ivied walls, the whole look of the entire place; all told the one same story of cold pinching avarice, and decay.

They were glad enough, therefore, to find a cheerful fire burning in the old library, the room with a look of life about it, and a good luncheon on the table: for all which good things they had only Mr. Thorn to thank. Before any business was done, he insisted that they should eat some cold chicken, and have a glass of good wine.

“Our business to-day is dreary and sad enough, my friends,” he said; “but you must now look it in the face like men of the world—as that which is inevitable. You have a dreary past to start from, but the future is more or less in your own hands. But now for some cold chicken ; by-and-bye we shall have work.”

Luncheon was soon over, and the next thing was to find the will. Cupboards, drawers, book-shelves, and recesses were ransacked, but ransacked in vain. No document of any kind could be found, and every known hiding-place had been exhausted.

Then the lawyer rang for old Sally Hill, and stated the case to her.

“Is there no other corner or cranny you can think of, which the master may have used ?”

“Yes, there is one, sir ; only one as I

knows of, and that's the big deal box there in the corner, full of peas what he used to feed the pigeons on. I've knowed the master hide papers in there afore now."

And there, sure enough, some six inches below the surface, was the missing document found.

"Stay, Sally, you may be mentioned in this paper, stay and hear it read."

Then in a strong, clear voice, Mr. Thorn read as follows :

"I, Samuel Hastings of Barton Manor, being of sound mind, and in the sixtieth year of my life, bequeath to Sally Hill my old and faithful servant the sum of five hundred pounds ; and all my other monies, possessions, goods and chattels of all and every kind, and all my lands, wheresoever and whatsoever, I leave and bequeath to my two children for their sole use. This I declare to be my last will and testament,

to be put in force as soon after my death as possible."

This paper, duly dated, signed, and witnessed, the lawyer declared to be a perfectly legal document, all the provisions of which could be carried out forthwith, or as soon as Antony was of age—as the Court of Chancery should decide.

"Meanwhile," he added, "it only remains for you two young men to fix upon some united plan of action, and agree as to the exact division of the estates; or leave it to the Court to settle for you. If you ask my advice, I should say, agree upon a plan yourselves, have it sanctioned by the Court and recorded, and then you will have no further trouble. I will undertake to put all matters in train for you, and in a month or six weeks, no doubt, Mr. Antony Hastings, will be Lord of the Manor of Barton."

A plan of action was soon agreed upon, and it was Antony himself who proposed an equal division of all monies and possessions; the land being by successive wills strictly entailed, as the lawyer had previously told them. To this, of course, Gerald could but readily agree. And then Mr. Thorn took his leave, and left the two brothers to talk over plans as to their future life.

When he got back to his office in Lincoln's Inn he sent for Simmons his head clerk; and then ensued a short dialogue.

“Simmons,” said the lawyer, “you have had some experience in queer wills, at Ferret's; have you looked at the will of old Sam Hastings of Barton Manor?”

“I just saw it, sir, when it came to the office, but as you said nothing to me about it, I merely locked it up.”

“There it is, then; read it over again, and tell me what it looks like.”

It was read in two minutes, and then Simmons replied—

“It seems all right, sir, though it’s an odd sort of a document. There are no other children, I suppose?”

“Oh, no; and no other relation but a sister’s son, a fellow called Lorrimore, I fancy, that ran away to sea, or enlisted, and died of yellow fever, so I have heard, years ago. The old man seems to have been the very last of the family. The sister and her husband both died before he did; and he always said that he had no other relations.”

“Then all must be right, sir, so far as your clients are concerned.”

“Very good, Simmons; see that all the necessary papers are ready for the Court when wanted.”

All that need be said further here is, that in the course of the next few months, the matter came duly before the Court of Chancery, and was duly settled. The old Manor House was, as far as possible, put to rights, cleaned, and made habitable; the gardens restored to something like garden beauty; Sally was pensioned off, to her great regret, and in spite of many protests; while the two brothers were established in different sets of rooms, though they met at dinner and were good friends. How this amount of difference gradually arose between them, how Antony in due time came of age—to which time the Court had deferred his entering into full possession—and the lawyer formally surrendered his office of guardian, are all matters that need not be told in detail.

“Whatever you do,” was old Thorn’s parting word of advice to the brothers,

“don’t go to law. If you must quarrel, come to me, and for six-and-eight-pence you may get what may save you from years of misery.”





CHAPTER X.

TWO YEARS AFTER.

“Nay, 'tis time enough,
For fools to waste, while wise men gather fruit.”

STAFFORD.

Ndue time Mr. Antony Hastings became of age, the Court of Chancery approved of what their guardian proposed for carrying into effect the will of the late Lord of the Manor, and the two young men had by degrees settled down into their new mode of life. There was a clear income of about a thousand a year from funded property and land, besides the ready money found in the

house ; all of which they had agreed to share equally, the elder brother only reserving to himself the rent of some few fields called the Manor Farm, which Gerald readily gave up. Then came the question of household expenses and joint payments, about which there arose some considerable difference of opinion ; Antony inclining to spend as little as possible, Gerald to deal with matters with a far more lavish hand.

“ Good heavens, Jerry, you will soon make ducks and drakes of your money if you go to work in this fashion. Why, a gardener will cost a hundred a year, at the very least; just for the sake of a few flowers, too, that you may get from London for half the money. *I* can’t afford it. That’s all I know.”

“ But it isn’t for the sake of a few flowers only; but because I do not care to see the old place in such utter desolation.

It looks like the castle of Giant Despair now; weeds and straggle and dirt wherever one turns. If you can't afford it I must; and it need not cost so much as you say, though I dare say the old man will get his living out of it, somehow or other."

"I have no doubt he will. But if you are going to do it out of your own pocket, all well and good, though I can't say I like these old retainers hanging about a place. If old Banks looked after Barton Gardens, as he says, in our grandfather's time, he must be pretty close upon eighty now, and not worth a penny a day as far as work is concerned."

And so the matter ended for a time. But this scrap of dialogue was only a type of what went on about a score of other matters, until at last the brothers were driven to consult Thorn; and he, after

hearing both sides of the story, decided that the best plan would be for them to divide the old Manor House between them, each living as he pleased, and with one staff of servants answering for both. To this last clause, however, Tony only agreed after a very long and troublesome battle, in which he was beaten inch by inch, and finally driven to give way by the fact being made clear to him that he would save money by adopting it. This was an argument to which he never turned a deaf ear.

Thus it fell out that, though living in the same house, the brothers by degrees chose their own habits and ways of life; their own companions and amusements, and thus, though still good friends, as the character of each developed, the line which divided them grew slowly wider and more marked. Antony gave himself up greatly

to pigeon shooting, and to such companions as that elegant and innocent pastime attracts and delights. Gerald hated it, and in his passionate way remarked that it was a low, brutal, business, fit only for butcher boys and blacklegs.

“ If you want sport,” he would say, “ go down to Barton Rise, and get some savage partridges among the turnips; or spend 5*l.* on a railway ticket, and kill grouse where they have got a chance of escape, out on the open moor. But for God’s sake, Tony, don’t go in for slaughtering these poor tame things out of a trap. Why I would as soon shoot the canaries in Miss Thorn’s aviary.”

But Tony was not much given to argue, and merely said in reply, “ Well, well, if you like to shoot canaries you can. I don’t.”

This was but the beginning of differences

between the two brothers, but the breach gradually widened more and more, and at last imperceptibly touched all the main features in their daily life. Antony not only persisted in his pigeon matches, but even had recourse to his father's old dovecot to supply him with birds, which he sometimes sold at a cheap rate to such of his brother sportsmen as needed them. And this of course made Gerald even more indignant than ever, and he brought to bear on the whole scheme his sharpest words of irony and contemptuous sarcasm. He quizzed many of the men who came to shoot, and made savage remarks as to their dress and personal appearance; such as, "It was lucky the Lord of the Manor let them have their birds cheap, as higher terms might put the noble sport beyond their reach; and still luckier that they never made bets on any but safe professionals."

All this, and much more similar banter the object of it seemed to bear with a quiet sort of indifference; but none the less was it felt, and none the less did he lay it up in store for some day of future reckoning.

“Fire away, Jerry,” he would answer sometimes; “it doesn’t hurt me, and seems to amuse you. Tom Punter and Captain Straw are coming up this afternoon, and if you don’t like them you can get out of their way. Ta, ta! my boy.”

Beyond this degree of notice, Antony rarely went; for, for several reasons he did not wish to come to an open rupture with his brother, and especially as it might lead to Gerald’s leaving the Manor House altogether. Tom Punter and Captain Straw were both, as he well knew, men of doubtful repute, but they were crack shots, and kept alive the eclât of the matches,

as well as a spirit of betting, by which, under their guidance, combined with a little horse-racing, he could often make a profitable book; so he was content to be patient, as he said, “under his virtuous brother’s admonitions.”

So by degrees it came to pass that Gerald spent more and more lonely hours among his books; sometimes in town at a junior club, to which Thorn’s kindly word had helped to introduce him, and far more at the lawyer’s own house, where a game of chess with that bright and lively antagonist who had greeted him on his first return to London, had become to him one of his choicest pleasures. Her ready intelligence and genial sympathy had gained on him more and more; and even the little touches of womanly vanity and love of praise which now and then peeped out, had a sort of charm for him. Freely

but delicately he now and then paid the little compliments which pleased her, but he did it with true daintiness of touch ; and so, as he thought, what was her vanity but a quiet appreciation of his skill ? Her wit and beauty, in his eyes, deserved all and every praise ; and he had not even yet forgotten the days when a glimpse of her face at the window was to his boyish eyes like sunshine on a day of November clouds. Not that he breathed even to himself the thought of love ; much less cared to express his admiration in words. But silently and steadily her society, the sound of her voice, the glance of her eyes, was becoming to him more and more a part of his daily life ; and though Antony often accompanied him in these visits, he had not yet found out how much he preferred those visits in which his brother took no part.

This was the state of affairs when one

day, after some hours in town, Gerald on his way home found himself in the neighbourhood of Barton's Rents, and then trying to make a short cut through Turnstile Street into the main road. This street consisted of a long straggling row of irregular and badly built houses, with small patches of dusty grass in front of each, that had once been called gardens. At the doors of most of these houses lounged dirty, slatternly women, or half dressed men, with short pipes in their mouths, and many evil words even fouler than the grimy pipes. Squalling, ragged children played about inside the railings which separated the patches of grass from the pavement, at times getting in the way of the foot-passengers. As Gerald passed one of the groups, a boy of ten or twelve pushed roughly up against him as he did so, holding a miserable half-starved kitten

by its tail, and swinging it round and round in the air.

The cries and shrieks of the wretched animal at once arrested him.

“I say, my boy, you are hurting that kitten. Put it down! Do you hear?”

The only answer to this was a fresh whirl in the air, fresh screaming of agony from the kitten, and a grin of impudent delight on the face of the torturer.

Whereupon Gerald quietly seized the boy by the ear.

“Now,” said he, “I shall hold on here (giving him a sharp pinch by way of emphasis), until you drop that kitten. Do you hear?”

“Yes, I hears; and you let go now, will you? or you’ll catch it.”

Here the pinch on the ear became much tighter, and the boy roared out with pain;

but still refused to let go the kitten, which yelled louder than ever.

The contest continued for half a minute, when his own sufferings became so intense that he flung the half maddened creature to the ground—and then finding his own ear released, fled howling to his mother at the door of No. 6, where a crowd soon collected to hear his tale of wrongful suffering.

Meanwhile, Gerald went calmly on his way towards the main road, not sorry to have won the day, even in such a trifle as the life of a kitten; but at first unconscious that an angry crowd was gradually forming at the door of the house, and that a perfect shower of foul words was following him down the street. Presently, however, some of these imprecations reached his ears, and on turning round he became aware that some half dozen hulking ruffians, with two or three

slatternly women at their head, were actually in full pursuit of him. The men were showering the wildest curses on his head, and shouting to him to stop; while one with a large bludgeon in his hand swore he would break every bone in his body, as “a d——d swell.”

For a moment Gerald paused, as if uncertain what to do; but after looking carefully round and ascertaining that there was not a policeman in sight, nor any other decent man to whom he could appeal for help, he decided that his only chance of escape from a very rough handling was in immediate flight. It was a dangerous expedient. But he took to his heels, and ran as hard as he could in the direction of the main road, with the whole body of his pursuers in full cry after him. In two minutes he had fairly distanced his enemies, with the exception of three of the roughest

and biggest scoundrels, who seemed determined to overtake him, and now began to raise fresh shouts of vengeance. Gerald was a light and swift runner, but finding that they gained on him, he determined to put on a sudden spurt and get clear away from them; and just then he regained the main road which ran at right angles to Turnstile Street, and found himself in a crowded thoroughfare. Following this for about a hundred yards to the right, and his pursuers not yet in sight, he turned suddenly into a shop, so as to completely elude them. It was the shop of a stranger, kept by one Martin Glenny, a Bookseller, into which he chanced to enter; with a board outside the window on which was set forth a row or two of books and pamphlets, under the guardianship of a small sharp boy.

There were two men in the shop, one the

foreman; but the master, a bright-eyed, intelligent looking man, stood at a side-table, near the end of the counter, apparently examining the binding of some new books; while behind him, at the back of the shop, Gerald caught a glimpse of a pleasant parlour, where sat a young and pretty woman at work, talking now and then to a boy of three or four at play on the floor. Gerald's entry was somewhat noisy and abrupt, and rather startled Glenny, though he only said, very quietly—

“What might you please to want, sir?”

“Five minutes, shelter, if you can give it to me.”

“Ten, if you please, sir; besides, one good turn deserves another.”

“But what good turn have I ever done you,” said Gerald, “to deserve a return now?”

“Don’t you remember helping a blind man and his wife across Holborn one night, in the midst of pouring rain? I have often wondered whether I should ever see you again. And now here you are; I thought that you would come some day, and I knew your voice in a moment.”

“It’s an odd coincidence,” replied Gerald; “for I had utterly forgotten all about the crossing on Holborn Hill, as you may easily imagine.”

And then he told the blind man the story of the kitten.

“Six to one is rather long odds,” he added, when his story was done, “and so I thought that discretion was the better part of valour, and fairly ran for it. Otherwise I think there would have been a case for Mr. Beak to-morrow morning. It is odd enough that I should have stumbled on your shop.”

And then they fell into a long and

pleasant chat about coincidences, which according to Glenny's theory were the commonest things going.

“I don't know much about their being common,” said Gerald at last; “but I will tell you of a singular one that happened just before I left school. Old Limber the master wanted to make a present to a big fellow who was leaving, and wrote to town for a volume of sermons. The bookseller wrote back to say that the book was out of print, but that he had met with a second-hand copy which, if he (Limber) approved should be forwarded. Accordingly it was sent, and turned out to be an old copy which had been given many years before by Limber himself to a previous pupil who had gone to London, and showed how highly he valued sermons by selling them at a bookstall.”

“Yes,” replied Glenny, “it's not a bad

case; but I can give you a far better one that happened here to myself. One day a stranger came into the shop and asked for a copy of Blair's Sermons, a well-known common book, altogether out of fashion now. He looked at the only copy I had, bought it, and paid for it; and then was about to leave the shop, when he suddenly stopped and said—

“‘ If you have no objection, I will leave the book with you till I happen to be passing again.’

“‘ By all means,’ said I, ‘ as long as you please.’

“ Well, sir, I kept the book stored away in a corner, ready for the owner, when he should call; but month after month passed away, and I saw nothing of him. Then, so it fell out, I gave up my old premises at No. 190, and took these at No. 70, where you now see me; and so three

months more passed away, but not a word of my friend the purchaser of Blair. At last, one morning, an old lady came into the shop, and asked for a copy of Blair's Sermons. 'I have but one copy,' I answered, 'and I fear that I cannot part with that one, for it was bought and paid for six months ago, though the owner has never called for it.'

"But the old lady was very urgent with me, and my wife of course took her part, and said I could easily get another copy; and so at last I gave way. My new customer handed me a sovereign to pay for her book, and I turned round to my desk there, to get change, when some one else suddenly entered the shop, and I heard a sharp voice say—

"'A pretty dance you have led me, Mr. Glenny. Here have I been hunting up and down the street for half an hour, in search

of my old friend Blair. I could have sworn that it was at No. 190 that I bought it. I hope that the book is all safe.'

" ' You are quite right,' said I, ' as to No. 190; it was at my old house that you bought it, and there is your copy of Blair tied up in paper as you left it, six months ago. This lady had just persuaded me to let her have it, and I was just turning to give her change when you walked in and claimed your own property.'

" ' And I mean to have it, too,' said the old man, in rather a peppery tone.

" ' Of course, sir,' added Glenny, " *he did* have it; and I had to get another copy for the lady."

After some further chat, Gerald found that he was already late, and must be off if he wished to be at Mr. Thorn's in time for dinner; and so, thanking his new friend for shelter, and much pleased with his clever-

ness in managing the business of a large shop, he made the best of his way home. This was only the first of many visits paid to the blind bookseller, and at last led to their becoming great friends. At every visit he was more and more struck with the blind man's keen intelligence and good sense, especially in all that related to books. There were many hundreds on his shelves, and there was scarcely one that he could not lay his hand on at a minute's notice; or concerning which he could not tell a customer the price and binding, with a shrewd word or two as to its general contents, if asked to do so.

“I know their faces,” he had said to Gerald, “as well as if I could see them. And directly a new book comes into stock, I feel him all over, and take his bearings, then settle him down into his own exact place. Now and then, my wife, or the

shopman, or that monkey of a boy at the door, happens to meddle with a shelf, and then, of course, for a time, I am all at sea."

"As to their outsides, it is all plain enough, Glenny; but what puzzles me is how you contrive to know so much of the inside."

"Ah, there you see, my other pair of eyes work for me. My wife Mary, who loved me well enough to marry a blind man (and that's saying a good deal), is a first-rate reader; and we work steadily on so many hours every night, at all the best books; and as I can't read a tenth part of what Paternoster Row sends out, I get a good notion of some hundreds of them from the *Saturday* and the *Spectator*, and now and then a Quarterly. Without her, you see, my life would be a blank; but with her love, and her eyes, and my own

memory, what more can I want? What she once reads, I never forget."

When Gerald got near to Barton Villa, where he was to dine that night, he found that he was very late, too late in fact to go home and dress; and as he was puzzling his head as to what was to be done, a cab driving rapidly past pulled up close to the pavement, and a jolly voice said to him—

"What, Gerald Hastings! Where are you drifting to at this time of night? Do you know that you are a mile from Barton Villa, and that dinner will be on the table in twenty minutes? Jump in, man, jump in."

Gerald accordingly jumped in, explained his troubles to Mr. Thorn, and was ordered not to dream for a moment of going on to the Manor House.

"Come home with me, sir," said his

kindly host; “and we will furbish you up in some way. I will make all excuses to the ladies, and the only two other guests are your own brother and the Curate of St. Patrick’s, a clever crack-brained Irishman, who has gone crazy over some new book about civilization, but works like a horse in his parish. There, now it’s settled; so not a word more.”

When Gerald reached the drawing-room he found all the party assembled, and everybody on the *qui vive* to hear his adventures. So there was nothing for it but to make his peace by telling the whole story.

“Just like you, Gerald,” said his brother, “always putting your finger into somebody else’s pie. What on earth had you to do with the kitten?”

“But it was as much my pie as any-

body else's, and I could not see the poor brute tortured in that style."

"The worst of it is," said the lawyer, "that the miserable little creature had a worse time of it than ever as soon as you were gone. Is it nine or seven lives that a cat has? What does *Tickler* say, Mr. Dunster, about the feline race? How many kittens per cent. die in infancy, or by tail-twisting?"

"Papa, you are very rude. Don't mind him, Mr. Dunster."

"My dear Amy, St. Patrick knows me too well to think me rude. And besides, the question of mortality among cats is a very interesting one, and statistics are the very essence of the great work."

At this moment dinner was announced, and the host signalled to the curate to convoy his wife.

"No, no, papa," said the younger lady,

“that will not do at all; I am dying to hear who *Tickler* is, and so I shall take down Mr. Dunster myself; Mr. Antony will take mamma, and you can bring up the rear with the defender of distressed kittens.”

And so, amidst much laughter, in this order they went down to dinner, spread as of old on a round table.

Amy, as usual, was the life of the whole party, and the conversation wandered readily on from cruelty to animals, especially cats (who, according to Mr. Thorn, could safely undergo any amount of ill-treatment short of skinning), to Martin Glenny and blind people generally, and the inevitable comparison between them and the deaf and dumb; and so on by a sudden freak to Guaxara, a Mexican silver-mine, and the new company just started to work it, of which Mr. Thorn was a director.

Amy was sitting between the curate and Gerald, and while a fierce debate on expenses, profits and losses, went on at the opposite side of the table, there fell out at intervals the following dialogue.

“Now, Mr. Dunster, papa has got fairly into Tom Tidler’s ground in Mexico, and is safe for twenty minutes good, my chance comes. I want to know who *Tickler* is?”

“Not know *Tickler’s History of Civilization*? Is it possible, me dear Madam? It’s the Book of the age; he has been at work on the first ten volumes for the last twenty years, and one is now just out. The preface contains a list of four thousand volumes, all of which he thoroughly digested before he began to write.”

“He has a *good* digestion, then?” interrupted Gerald.

“Yes, sir, he has something like a digestion. His father came of a Danish family,

a Norseman, I think; and his mother was one of the Easts of Donegal—and——”

“And the North-east is a mighty strong wind,” suggested Gerald.

“Just so, me dear sir. Well you see, *Tickler* just lays down fixed laws and eternal principles for everything that has happened from the Creation to this very hour. It’s all a matter of calculation, number, measurement, ratio and average. Now there’s that old gentleman at the other side of the table talking about the price of geese this Michaelmas, as if he belonged to the very same genus.”

“He’s my father, at all events, and I’m his only gosling,” said Miss Thorn.

“Well, then, we’ll take the other gentleman ; he seems just as wise a bird.”

“Thank you,” said Gerald, “that bird is my brother, but you are welcome to him.”

“Just for mere argument, me dear sir,

I'll take him—just for mere argument. Ah! now, they've left the question of geese and have got to murders and sudden deaths, and suicides, and the question of morals. Pardon me for saying that they don't seem to understand this matter *one bit* more than the other. As for death, you see, there's only one thing to be said about death, and that is, it's a mercy that it always comes at the end of life and not in the middle. But as for suicides, read *Tickler*, me dear Miss Amy; it's not a question of morals or no morals at all, and has nothing to do with sickly seasons or healthy ones. It's all a question of cause and effect. Every event, great or small, has some cause, some motive or other that set that cause afloat, just as some preceding cause raised up that motive, and so things have been jogging on for the last ten thousand years or so, rather a longish

chain, but in *Tickler* as clear as A B C. One man in two thousand and three quarters makes away with himself every year. Sometimes it's one of those obstinate sick paupers, after a month's generous diet of thin slices of cheese from the Union, sometimes a stockbroker who has been making free with other people's money; but the fixed law is always the same, either of the two is but a link in the endless chain."

"And am I only a link, Mr. Dunster, in the endless chain? And you, and Mr. Tickler, and mamma—are we all links?"

"My dear," interrupts mamma, across the table, "the Lynx is a very elegant creature indeed; your father and I saw it on Sunday last in the 'Zoo.'"

"Nothing more or less, me dear Miss Amy," replies St. Patrick, "nothing but mere links in the chain of cause and effect. But you must read *Tickler* for yourself,

and see what he says about the connexion between rice and earthquakes, sugar and volcanoes, woolly hair and predestination, brass buttons and population; the laws of free-will and sea-breezes, the census, mad-dogs and red hair. It's an amazing book."

"It must be," said Gerald. "But you're getting rather personal when you come to red hair; and I must say it's rather hard that I should be picked out as the special link to have fiery locks, though, I see now, it's by no fault of my own, more than it was *Tickler's* to have to write the history of cause and effect from Adam down to Joey Hume."

"Or Mr. Dunster's to have to preach *Tickler*?" replied Amy, looking innocently up into his face. "But what a memory you must have, Mr. Dunster, to remember all the little links in *Tickler's* ten volumes; how can you ever manage it?"

“ How?—nothing can be easier to a memory like mine. You see one Irish curate in eleven thousand eight hundred and two has a powerful memory, and I just happen to be that one. I can repeat whole chapters of *Tickler*. ‘ A dinner-party like this,’ says one of his authors,* ‘ made up of true elements, is the last triumph of civilization over barbarism. Nature and art combine to charm the senses; the equatorial zone of the system is soothed by well-studied artifices; the faculties are off duty, and fall into their natural attitudes; you see wisdom in slippers, and science in a short jacket.’ ”

“ Not *all* the faculties, Mr. Dunster; for I heard you say just now, as if you were reflecting to yourself, soup good; fish rather tough; champagne sweet—though you ate

* O. W. Holmes.

and drank of all three," said Amy, hardly knowing how to conclude, "as if you relished them, at all events."

"*Heartily*, you mean," replied St. Patrick, smiling a grim smile—"quite so; and that I take to be the main object in view at a dinner-party, in bringing people together who don't know each other, with different tastes, appetites, and digestions, and expecting them to fraternize in an atmosphere rarely below 75°."

"Well," replied Amy, "I did mean *heartily*."

"Then, why not say so? The fact is," he added in a lower voice, "only two ladies in two hundred and fifteen and a quarter ever do say what they mean at first. But, it's entirely owing to the way young ladies are brought up now, that's it."

"Yes, Mr. Dunster, no doubt, but I must insist nevertheless on being one of

the two who do say what they mean. As for *Tickler*, I begin to fear that it is a very terrible book."

"Not at all, me dear madam, not at all. If only people would but look a little into 'cause and effect' before they begin to talk. Now, there was our dear friend Mrs. Thorn opposite, just now on her pet subject of missions to Boolawaddy, arguing about sending out flannel jackets to a set of savages who will sell every scrap of them for rum and tobacco; and the best way of initiating Sambo into the mysteries of grace and free will, while he insists on keeping a seraglio, smearing himself with train oil and red ochre, and would rejoice to have a cut of cold clergyman on the sideboard. If she had but read *Tickler* twenty years ago, she would see all this in—"

"But, they must make a beginning some-

how," said Gerald, who enjoyed drawing out the amusing Irishman, " and the truth will——"

" The truth, me dear sir? that's just it. No two of the people who go out to preach it are agreed as to what the truth is, or the meaning of their own favourite texts. Every man of them adds to the plain letter a watery gloss of his own, without which the truth in his eyes is no truth at all. No, no, me friend; first make the nigger wash himself and wear pantaloons, give up rum and red ochre, and then you may make a Christian of him as soon as you like."

" And are those particular garments indispensable?" gravely asked Amy; " if so, Mr. Dunster, it's rather awkward for us poor females, even in this enlightened country."

" And our first parents——" said Mrs. Thorn, across the table.

But this was more than St. Patrick

could possibly stand. "Me dear Madam," he rather fiercely broke out, "Bloomerism is making its way at last in our benighted country ; Dr. Elizabeth Bunting has taken her degree, and the age of sense and reason and science is beginning to dawn at last ; and when *Tickler* is more understood a very different state of things will commence. The world, just now, is mentally blind ; crammed with old women's fables, and the rhapsodies of fatuous parsons. As to our first parents, as Hixley says, 'How do we know we ever had any first parents ? or when the gorilla first began to wear aprons—'"

But luckily, at this crisis the host's cheery voice called out, "Mr. Dunster, will you say Grace for us?"

And say it he did, in one swift, rapid jerk, the shortest and hardest form of thanks ever printed. It consisted of three words —"Thank God, Amen."

Not that St. Patrick had the least intention of being irreverent, or unthankful, after a good dinner. He believed in the Giver of daily bread, as well as in a cook ; but the whole tone and bias of his mind were saturated with *Tickler*, and every thing must be square, precise, and hard, accordingly. The old lawyer knew his man, and understood him. Antony had been regarding him as he would have looked at a strange fossil ; Mrs. Thorn was simply amazed. But after a moment's lull, the whole tide of conversation was soon in full swing again ; the Boolawaddy Mission revived between Tony and Mrs. Thorn ; then the East wind and rain, that the Lord of the Manor wanted for his turnips ; crochet, and the gorilla question. Concerning this last question, indeed, Dunster was eager for the fray.

“ Now,” said he, looking keenly round as he spoke, “ what about first parents ?”

“ Well,” said Gerald, “ I don’t know exactly what your family may be, but we Hastings people belong to the Hastings’ of Battle, and we haven’t a taste of the gorilla among us.”

At which there was a good laugh, in which none joined more heartily than St. Patrick himself; and the host and Antony quietly got back again to the old topic of crops, and a special Collect at church on the previous Sunday.

“ Me dear Mr. Thorn,” cries out the curate, “ what is the use of worrying yourself about Collects for rain? You can’t have any rain till you get a change of wind.”

“ Then we’ll pray for change of wind,” replies Gerald.

“ But that all depends on atmospheric changes, and the laws of natural phenomena.”

“ Quite so,” interposed Thorn ; “ but who regulates the changes of atmosphere and controls the laws ? It’s quite clear that we can’t and don’t, or I should have had rain for my turnips months ago. We must go to the fountain-head, Dunster, after all, and as I take it, He that made the laws must be greater than his own handiwork, and——”

“ But the question,” replies St. Patrick, “ is whether He will interfere with the working of His own laws ? ”

At this point, however, again came in the voice of the cheery host, who thought that affairs were now getting too hot ; “ The fact is,” said he, “ you are all in the wrong box. The laws control themselves entirely. They made themselves at the first, just manage their own affairs of wet and dry at their own sweet will, and as it suits their own crops.”

St. Patrick had too much good sense

not to see how this was intended to be taken, and so answered cheerily enough,

“ All right, me dear sir, the rain will come all in good time, no doubt. The worst thing ye can do is to be always thinking it’s East wind that’s coming; it’s sure to come if ye do. I thought the East wind was coming all day last night, but it didn’t.”

At which characteristic speech shouts of laughter followed, and the talk fell into quieter channels, though the Irishman couldn’t for the life of him understand the cause of their merriment.

“ You English people,” he said, “ are always laughing at us Irish for making Bulls, though for the life of me I can’t make out what I have said to set you all off; but other people would do the same if they had life enough in them. If a Frenchman does it, you call it, *espièglerie*,

but poor Paddy is simply a fool. Here's Talleyrand's wife, now,—she says, 'I'm so glad I don't like spinach.' 'Why?' says her husband. 'Why? because, don't you see, if I did like it, I should eat so much of it, and I *hate* it!' Now, no Irishman would have said that to his husband—that is, to her wife——"

At which there were fresh shouts of laughter; and then, at a signal from Mrs. Thorn, the ladies retired.

When they were gone, Antony Hastings led the talk back at once to "Guaxara," the silver mine, and 10 per cent. for his money.

"I want to hear," said he, "and I want Gerald to hear more of this affair, Mr. Thorn, if Dunster will give him up for five minutes from the "spirit-rapping" question over which he has gone crazy. Three per cent. is all very well, no doubt, but in these days

of progress, it seems to me very slow work, and our income is small enough for a great place like the Manor House."

So Gerald and the parson gave up the question of Mediums and Mr. D. Home for a time, and the lawyer began to unfold the glowing fortunes of the Guaxara mines, and the new Company.

The upshot of a long talk was the following remark from the Director :

"Well, young men, there, as far as I know, is the exact position of the new Company. If you ask my advice, I should say, be content with your 3 per Cent. Consols. But if you will not be content with three, and demand ten, shares are now to be had in the Guaxara mine. Think well of it; and don't be in a hurry to decide the question at once. They will be in the market for some days

yet, no doubt. And now let us go upstairs and have some coffee."

This was a wise speech, and well adapted to stimulate the keen appetite of Antony Hastings for the 7 per cent. additional ; and he went upstairs in a serenely good humour.

Once there, the lawyer and his wife, the parson and Antony, set to work at a cosy game of whist, while Gerald met his old antagonist at chess.

So diligently did both parties pursue their game, that it was really late when at last the Curate started up and declared that he must go.

"But you two," said the lawyer, turning to Gerald, "had better stay here to-night. Your old room is quite ready ; and you can decide about the "*Guavaras*" to-morrow morning. It is always well to sleep on such matters."

And, to this they readily agreed.



CHAPTER XI.

BY NIGHT.

“ I have no words to thank you, sir,
But I shall live your debtor all my life.”

OTWAY.

 HERE was a small garden at the back of Barton Villa, and there for half an hour, in the quiet moonlight, the two brothers walked up and down and chatted as they smoked, before bed-time.

“ I say, Gerald, it strikes me that this offer of Thorn’s is a very good one that we ought not to let slip—what say you?”

“ Well, I dare say it’s all right, but I am content with the 3 per Cents ; and don’t

much care to risk what little I have in silver mines."

"There can be no risk, if it's all right; and old Thorn is not at all the man to be mixed up with shaky things."

To this, at first, there was no reply; but the end of a rambling talk between the brothers was an agreement that they should, if possible, jointly mortgage the estate for two thousand pounds, to be invested in Guaxara shares, provided Thorn could get as many, and at the same time guarantee that there would be no liability beyond the amount invested.

"But I see how it is, Gerald," added his brother, "at present, with you; and I might as well reason with the man in the moon. You're crazy about that little girl upstairs. Well, well, my boy, take care that she doesn't throw you over, that's all. That's her room, up there, over the kitchen, where

the light burns ; ‘O brighter than the moon a thousand-fold !’—there’s the first line of a sonnet for you, which I know you have been working at for the last half-hour. What a pity it is that I am here ; if you and the moon only had it between you, now, you might have serenaded her. But, by Jove,” he added, “there goes the light,—out ; it’s time for us too to be off—unless you are going to mount guard till dawn.”

“Many thanks, Tony, for your opening stanza ; if I’m hard up for a rhyme I shall know at all events where to come for one ; but meanwhile don’t be too lavish in your gifts, though after a second pipe your imagination is apt to run riot I know. A Sonnet is not in my line at all ; besides, it’s getting cold, and I am tired.”

Half an hour after this, Antony, like the rest of the household, was sound

asleep, while Gerald's keen and busy brain still reviewed the events of the day. In spite of all he could do to rid himself of them, Martin Glenny and tortured kittens, the law of sea-breezes and red hair, Tickler and the East wind, and, above all, a pair of laughing black eyes glancing at him across a chess-board, all mingled in odd confusion, and kept him awake and perplexed with idle thoughts which he would have gladly cast aside. But the most troubled thinker falls asleep at last, and so at length it happened with "the defender of kittens."

How long he slept, he never rightly knew, but when he awoke again it was with a start and a cry. It was pitch dark, and the room was filled with dense smoke. Luckily his bed was near the door, of which he at once found the handle, and then begun to hunt for a box of matches. These at last he

found, struck a light, and having put on a few clothes, proceeded cautiously to wake his brother.

“Confound it, Gerald, what on earth are you waking a fellow up for at this time of night?”

“Tony,” he said, after giving him another shake, “there’s something all wrong here ; the house is full of smoke and on fire, I believe, downstairs. Get up ; be quick, man ; and let us go and see what is to be done. Dip your towel in the water-jug, and hang it across your face.”

In another second the sleeper was out of bed, and hurrying on his clothes, calling out, however, to his brother not to carry away the light.

Meanwhile, Gerald stepped out into the passage ; up which rolled a volume of thick smoke that nearly choked him, and almost extinguished the candle. He knew

nothing of the situation of the bedrooms, but he felt that not a minute was to be lost, if the sleepers were to be saved. The first rooms he came to were those of servants, who on being suddenly roused from sleep by a loud knocking, after the fashion of their kind, simply screamed and threatened to go into hysterics.

“For God’s sake,” said Gerald, “go and call your master and mistress, instead of screaming there like a pack of fools. You know where their rooms are; I don’t. Go at once.”

The smoke grew thicker; and to add to his perplexity the candle suddenly went out, from a chance blow against the balusters. But having once reached the stairs, Gerald determined to make his way down, and if possible see where the fire was, and raise an alarm. Groping his way slowly and carefully on, he at last reached

the underground kitchen, where he found the volumes of smoke fiercer and denser than ever. All he could make out in a hurried glance was that a large horse covered with clothes, had fallen forward on the kitchen fire in a great heap which lay smouldering and half-burnt. Gradually the flames had set fire to the woodwork and a large wooden press close by, and were now slowly creeping up the sides of the room.

Half-choked and blinded with the heat and smoke, he saw in a moment that he could do nothing to check the fire single-handed, but must at once give the alarm. Closing the door, therefore, he crawled upstairs again, and guided by the balusters reached the first-floor, where he found two half-dressed servants rushing about under Thorn's directions, and with lights searching for some papers of value and the plate-basket ; the front door wide open, and

another group tending some one near the door, in the dingy moonlight.

“Are you all mad,” cried Gerald, “that you open the door? In two minutes that draught will have the whole story in a blaze! Has any one gone for the engines?”

“No one.”

Then, snatching up a hat from the hall table, and closing the door with a loud crash, he set off at the top of his speed to the nearest station, which was luckily close at hand. In less than two minutes he was back again at the house, just in time to find a policeman at the door in charge of sundry bundles of papers and other valuables, a crowd of idlers who seemed to have started up out of the earth, shouting Fire! and the bewildered household huddled together round Mrs. Thorn who had fainted in a sort of panic of excitement and terror,

but was now slowly coming to her senses.

As the old lawyer seized upon the young man, shook him mightily by the hand, and said, "Thank God! All safe! all safe!" Gerald looked nervously at the assembled group, and then suddenly called out—

"Are all there? Where is Miss Thorn?"

"Oh!" replied a servant, "she's all right, sir; I called her myself five minutes ago, and got her a cloak, and—"

"Cloak or no cloak, she is not here!"

"Stay!" he cried to Antony and to the old man, who both started forward at his words. "Neither of you could bear the smoke for one minute. Where is her room?"

"Second door on the right," screamed a chorus of voices, "at the top of the first landing!"

Snatching the amazed policeman's lan-

tern from his hand, Gerald hastily dashed up the stairs, and in a trice was at Amy's door. It was wide open, and the room empty. He searched every corner of it, but in vain. Then he rushed frantically down the passage to the next room, and in doing so tripped his foot against some unseen object, and almost fell. It was a heavy deal box, in the very centre of the passage, and close to it lay the prostrate body of her whom he sought. In another moment he had her in his arms, and was bearing her cautiously down the stairs, just after the engine had thundered up the street, and the firemen with their hatchets were smashing in the kitchen windows, and sending a deluge of water on the blazing woodwork.

Hurrying eagerly through the passage, in another moment Gerald had safely borne the poor girl out into the open air, and

there was a loud cry of “Saved! saved!” mingled with many a hearty “*God bless him!*” from the mob. But for several minutes she showed no sign of life; and it was not until water had been freely dashed into her face, and some brandy forced down her throat, that she began to revive. But in five minutes from that time all danger in the kitchen was over, the fire thoroughly quenched, and the reluctant mob had dispersed.

Doors and windows were now freely opened, a good fire was lighted in the dining-room, and as the smoke and steam by degrees cleared away, the assembled people began to find out that they were but half dressed. Hasty toilets were soon made, cold meat and bread were hunted out, and as terror died away, hunger and curiosity revived. Both having been hastily appeased, Gerald became the hero for

the night, and then Amy Thorn told her story.

“I was sound asleep,” she said, “and dreaming, I believe, some dreadful things about Tickler and the Boolawaddy savages, when one rushed at me, seized me by the throat, and screamed into my ear, ‘The place is all afire, Miss, and if you please ‘m, the smoke’s a comin’ up the stairs like mad.’ Then I woke up, and found Eliza shaking me to pieces by the arm, and trying to drag me out of bed. But she gave me a thick shawl to wrap over my head, and then rushed off down the passage screaming. I stayed but a minute or two to huddle on a few clothes, and then ran as fast as I could along the corridor to papa’s room, to make sure that *they* were safe, when I tripped against something and fell to the ground. After this I remember nothing more till I found myself, to my

amazement, on a chair in the street, with a policeman's lantern staring me in the face, and a crowd of people all about me."

Then she got up, and, with tears in her eyes, kissed her father and mother; and, as she shook Gerald by the hand, said very gravely—

"If it was proper, sir, for young ladies to kiss young gentlemen, you also would certainly have to undergo the operation; but as it is altogether contrary to the usages of polite society, you will escape, and I must be content with offering my heartiest and best thanks to the strong arm and stout heart that have saved my life."

And then, with a very demure face, she made him a bewitching little curtsey, and turned briskly to the old lawyer.

"As for you, papa," she said, "I am utterly ashamed of you; only think of your quietly

creeping out of your own room, getting safely downstairs, dragging out the plate-basket and some bundles of old trumpery papers, and leaving your poor unfortunate little child to be burnt to a cinder! I believe you intended to get rid of me altogether. But if you are insured, I hope that the office people won't pay a farthing!"

"My dear saucebox, you are better, I see; I am insured, and I hope they will pay a good many farthings, though one thing I should like to know, and that is, who set that infernal box in the middle of the passage upstairs?"

Then he rang the bell, and inquired of the servants; but not a word of intelligence could he gain. No one knew anything of it, and Eliza the housemaid, to whom it belonged, only muttered something about "Thieves, she supposed, a making their way unbeknown upstairs."

She might have added that, having thoroughly roused her young mistress, she suddenly called to mind a certain new dress of her own in a certain deal box, not far off, and, having rushed off to her bedroom, she had with infinite toil dragged it half-way down the passage—there became suddenly half-choked with smoke, and there been forced to leave her treasure in the darkness, where it nearly broke the necks of the hero and heroine of the night. But all this she prudently kept to herself, for there are times when even a maid servant's tongue knows how to be silent.

Mrs. Thorn was very enthusiastic over the whole matter, when all danger was over, and extolled Gerald's heroism to the very skies.

“My dear,” she said, “I consider that you have saved all our lives, and though Amy could not, of course, kiss a young

gentleman, her mother can,"—and so she did, very heartily.

Then the two young men took a cab, and went off to Barton Manor; while Mr. Thorn set out for town, calling on his way at the Insurance office, and handing in a rough estimate of the damage done by the fire.

"Well, Gerald?" said the elder brother, as they rattled off, "you have done a good night's work, anyhow. That girl is yours now, as safe as the bank!"

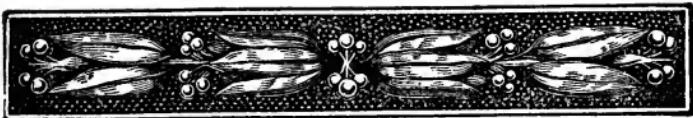
"Perhaps: but the bank is not mine yet; and what I did for Amy Thorn, I would have done—as any fellow would—for any woman in peril of her life. But where were you, Tony, all the time?"

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, for any woman if she is young and pretty, and you are desperately spooney over her!—don't be savage now; it's a true bill. As for

me, I'm too old and ugly for young ladies to dream of, and so I had to look after my carpet-bag in the bedroom, and a new umbrella in the passage. But of course some of those rascally cads had got into the passage, somehow or other, and nothing could be seen of my new umbrella. Of course Thorn will pay for it."

They reached the manor house just in time to meet Mr. Punter and Captain Straw at the gate, it being the day of a match for slaughtering sparrows, in which noble sport Antony Hastings was fast becoming a proficient.





CHAPTER XII.

WAKING UP.

“Love is the cross and passion of the heart,
Its end, its errand.”

J. P. BAILEY.

HE tragic incident of the fire produced very different effects in the two persons chiefly concerned in it; though both were at first unconscious how deep those effects were.

Amy's first and main thought was one of simple gratitude to the man who had saved her life, but she would have felt just the same gratitude to Antony Hastings if he had rescued her from sudden death; and

though she liked Gerald rather the best of the two, it was in vain that she searched her heart for traces of any tender feeling towards him.

She almost regretted that it should be so, and yet was forced to own to herself that so it was. In the first rapture of finding herself saved from a terrible fate, she had, indeed, half in earnest, and half in jest, talked of thanking him in a way altogether impossible to young ladies even in these fast days; but when the fire was but a few days old, and things had settled down into their old track, she felt that no deeper feeling than regard and gratitude had been roused.

But with Gerald it was very different.

His eyes were opened at once, and he knew now that the girl whom he had saved that night was dearer to him than life itself; that to rescue her he would

most gladly undergo a hundred such perils. And while the thought filled him with a great joy, it saddened him to find that on her part there seemed to be not a single spark of the deeper passion which filled his heart.

True, she had, half in jest, in her bewitching way, talked of kissing him there and then before the whole party; but no woman who really loved a man would have dreamed of uttering such words—and of this he felt convinced, though he hated and resisted the conviction.

“Safe as the bank!” It was all very well for Tony to banter him in this foolish style, but Amy Thorn seemed to him now to be further off than ever—more entirely beyond his reach. But though he thus found out the truth of the old line—

“Who says he loves, and is not wretched, lies,” *

* J. P. Bailey.

yet his passion roused him to a new and intense life that he had never before known, and filled him at times with a flush of joy that blotted out every trace of sorrow. After all she was so bright and beautiful and charming in his eyes, that she must, he thought, at last see the depth and tenderness of his passion, and give him if but a grain of love in return.

Altogether it made a new man of him.

This was the state of affairs when he chanced one day to call at Barton Villa, and to his surprise and great joy found Amy alone in the drawing-room. His visits had of late become more numerous than ever; but it had so happened that since the night of the fire they had never met but in the presence of others ; and though the whole matter of the fire had often been talked of, she had never specially alluded to her perilous escape.

She rose and shook hands with him, as he entered, very warmly, but without a shadow of nervousness or hesitation; and at once began to talk freely of the weather, of a purse she was knitting, and of a recent game of chess. But, at last, these topics were all worn out; there came a sudden silence; after which the talk touched upon more delicate ground.

“I am afraid, Mr. Gerald, you must have thought me a very heartless sort of person, that night of the fire ; for though I tried to thank you, I know that I failed. It is so hard to say all one feels at such a time.”

“No, no,” he answered eagerly, “I deserved no thanks ; and heartless I never could imagine you to be. The thought that I had helped to save you was reward enough for me.”

“Helped?” she repeated. “Don’t be so dreadfully humble. It was your doing,

and yours only; in fact, the whole household have you to thank for not being smoked or burnt to death. For the chances are ten to one that no one else would have wakened till it was too late; and you saw what servants are worth at such a time. And papa's life is a valuable one."

"No doubt it is," replies Gerald; "but I consider his daughter's life of yet greater value, and would gladly risk all to save it again, were the peril a hundred times as great." And this he said passionately, with flashing eyes.

She glanced up from her knitting, as he spoke, and met the gaze with eyes that kindled at his looks; and yet very quietly. She saw, in fact, that he meant what he said; and, with a woman's shrewdness, guessing that much lay hidden under these glowing words, hesitated for a moment; but only said, still very quietly—

“ You do not place a high value on your own life then?”

“ Pardon me,” he answered, “ it is quite possible for a man to value his life most highly, and yet hold another’s far more dear; to love life, as I do mine, and never so dearly as when it rescues that other from peril, for in saving that, he saves himself, and all that makes life worth having.”

“ You are drawing the picture of a true knight, indeed,” she said; “ but is such heroism to be found in these prosy days of hungry money-making?”

“ I hope so,” he replied. “ Money-making, in some shape or other, ruled men in other times pretty much, it seems to me, as it does in these; but good men and true were always to be found, as they still are, with hearts as alive to the passion of beauty and the grace of womanhood as in the brightest of King Arthur’s days.”

At this she looked up at him again with a winning smile that lighted up her whole face, as she answered—

“ You are getting quite poetical, Mr. Gerald; but perhaps you are a poet? and here am I talking the very soberest prose.”

“ No poet,” he answered, “ not a grain of poetry in me, unless it be poetry to feel deeply, and to say out what one feels. There are times when the heart must speak; and I know that——”

“ Do you know,” she eagerly interrupted —“ do you know that we are, I fancy, getting dreadfully philosophical all at once. And it’s growing so desperately hot here in this room; would you mind opening the window a little way?”

Gerald, smiling, opened the window, and let in a breath of air from the garden; but he had made up his mind to speak, and

so went resolutely back to the forbidden ground.

“Miss Thorn,” he said eagerly, “call it poetry or philosophy, or what you will, but my heart speaks out now, because it is full and must speak; and I am simply in earnest, as a man only is when the whole passion of his being is bound up with the life and welfare of another. For many a long day you must have seen and known and felt that but one thought, that of your happiness, was all in all to me; that the sound of your voice was music to my ear; your eyes brought me light, your presence sunshine, and the hope of your love new life itself. All this you must have seen and felt long, long, ago; and yet I tell you of it again, because the words are a joy to me as I utter them!”

He rose up as he spoke, as if about to come near her, and his burning, swift

words, poured out with such intense eagerness, touched the heart of the young girl, and made it thrill, though but for an instant, with wild and strange emotion. A faint tinge of colour dawned on her cheek for a moment as she rose gracefully and proudly to meet him.

“I believe that the words you have spoken,” she said, “come from your heart, and they are such as any woman might be proud to hear. But yet I am sorry that you have spoken them, for I cannot give you the answer which you seek. My heart does not answer with that passion which such words as yours demand—which alone deserves the name of love. But I thank you heartily for your kindly words, as I once tried to thank you for saving my life; and I regard and esteem you as a true friend. More I cannot say.”

And then she shook hands with him heartily, as before.

“Ah!” he answered, “bare regard and esteem such as yours are dear enough to me only; give me one grain of hope to sow in the desert with them, and they may yet grow, and I am content.”

“Not figs on thistles,” she answered laughingly; “so said St. Patrick, on Sunday last.”

“There is no knowing,” answered Gerald, “what may spring and grow from but one single seed of true hope, planted by loving hands. But don’t give me St. Patrick’s sermons; no stones for bread; a word of hope from your own lips, Miss Amy—this is what I need.”

And then he went on to plead his own cause again, even more ardently and more humbly than before; but at the end of a long debate he had not progressed a single

inch. She listened, indeed, to all he had to say, and answered his fervent words with a kindly earnestness and sincerity that only served to touch him more deeply than ever; but that was all.

If she did not utterly reject him, she was equally far from accepting his offer. He had resumed his chair once more, and she her knitting, when at length they seemed to have reached a quiet and safe table-land among the mountains, hitherto overlooked and forgotten.

“Even if it were so,” she said at last, “just as you argue, and even if I could give you, in answer to your avowal, such a return as it deserves, don’t forget the plain common-sense view of the question. I am older than you are, quite an old woman, in fact——”

“I only wish,” said Gerald, “that all London was peopled with such old women.”

“And old men to match them?” she gaily added; “of course you do, and so do I. But it is not so, unhappily; and you must not forget the sober common-sense view of the whole case. I must talk to you very gravely. Here you are just beginning life, with a younger brother’s fortune, just enough for club expenses and cigars, and bread and cheese and a gardener at the Manor House; and you propose to saddle yourself with a young lady, who has no money to speak *of*, and no expectations; who will eat you out of house and home in a week. My dear Mr. Gerald (she was actually laughing now), you don’t know me; I am the most mercenary being under the sun, most extravagant and selfish. I require no end of small luxuries, comforts, and indulgences, for I have been used to them all my life, and can’t do without them now. But this is not the kind of wife you are wanting,

and that you deserve to have inflicted on you. She would ruin you in a month."

"I'd gladly run all risks of such ruin," he answered; "all risks, and every risk; though I cannot and will not for a moment believe that you are really in earnest in what you say. But if I am not worthy of you now, or fit to have such a hope as I aspire to, tell me what can I do to be more worthy to make you listen to my suit? Give it up I never will. Set me any task or penance you like; but bid me look onwards to some future day."

"Make yourself, then," she said slowly, at last,—"make yourself a name and a place of your own, and then, if you can find some one worthy of such love as yours, she will be no burden to you, but be able to rejoice in your success, and share in your——"

But at this critical moment other visitors were suddenly announced. Presently Mrs.

Thorn returned from an hour's shopping, and the secret conference between the young people was rudely broken to pieces by the entrance of Miss Satchell and the Curate, who happened to meet at the gate of the garden, and sailed upstairs in company.

Gerald hastily shook hands with all the party, and at once took his leave ; inwardly cursing his evil fate in being thus miserably interrupted, and heartily wishing all the old maids and curates in the parish were at Jericho. He knew that he should get little comfort at Barton Manor, and less at his club ; yet he walked away hastily towards London, going on at a mighty pace, and musing as he went on all that had happened. In this frame of mind, he got as far as the shop of his friend Martin Glenny, and there naturally turned in for a chat.

Him he found as busy as usual, and as full of news from the world of books, but

rather out of sorts in the absence of his wife.

“She wanted a change, I am sure,” said Glenny, “and a breath of fresh air; and so I insisted on her going down into Hampshire for a week, and getting a glimpse of home and home faces. But now she is fairly gone, I feel as if she had carried away all the light out of the house with her. You can have no notion of what such a woman’s love is to me.”

“Pardon me,” said Gerald, “I know what light is to a house, and have often thought what a lucky fellow you were to get such a wife.”

“No doubt; and wondered, I dare say, how she ever came to marry a Blind man at all. So do I myself, again and again, I can assure you. But patience and perseverance will do a great deal, even after a man has been three times refused. ‘Well,’

said I, after the third time, 'I don't intend to give you up yet. I shall ask the same question, if I live as long, once a year for seven years; and then perhaps begin again.' ”

“ Patience and perseverance,” replied Gerald, “ will do a great deal, no doubt, but not make a woman love you. There must be a spark of real love to start with —however small; then perseverance may fight the battle and win, but not else.”

“ Yes; that I grant. And in my case, you see, it was all right. There was a grain of real love at the root of the matter —if I could only manage to get a breath of new life into it—ready to spring up, and face all difficulties.”

“ But, in my case,” interrupted Gerald —and here he suddenly came to a full stop.

The silence was sudden and strange; but the Blind man, though puzzled for a moment, seemed to understand the matter in a trice, though he could gather nothing from the troubled look on the face of his friend.

“In your case,” he boldly and brightly replied, “all will end, I hope, as happily as mine, some day. Seven years seems a longish time to wait, but it will be no more than a day if it win the love of a true woman’s heart. Only, be sure she is true, and be sure that she loves you; a mere barren ‘Yes’ from the lips with no heart in it, is worse a thousand times than the bitterest ‘No’ that woman ever uttered.”

“But marriage, they say, will bring love?”

“Once in a thousand cases, perhaps, and doubtful even then. Don’t forget the other nine hundred and odd who never know

what true love is; who are coupled but never made one; chained together for life, and yet as wide apart in heart and feeling and life, as if miles asunder."

" You speak sharply, my friend, as if you knew, what you never can have known,—the misery of such bondage as you tell of."

" Know it?" repeated Glenny, " I know it well enough; as a man must get his surest knowledge—by bitter experience. Five years ago I was a widower. I had married a woman who loved my money and position, when I believed that she loved *me*, and who thought she could win and rule all for herself and her relations, knowing that my father was a man of wealth, and fancying she could wheedle him, in his lonely old age, into being her slave as cleverly as she imagined she had wheedled his son. But she was too clever by half,

and too eager for us to put on our fetters; she showed her cards when she should have kept them beyond suspicion. What would have become of me, if she had lived, God only knows. But death, that does many hard things, was merciful in this case, and divided two people who had never been really one. This, you see, made me speak out so fiercely just now, and I think I was right. So, patience and perseverance is my creed. It's very common-place philosophy, I dare say, to say *nil desperandum*, for it has got down to be the motto of a Music Hall song, and so can't get much lower, and yet it is true."

Then Gerald wished him good morning, and went on his way, if not rejoicing, at least in better spirits with himself, and looking less gloomily on the future which lay hidden before him. His musings and meditations on his way home would fill

many pages ; but while they were pleasant enough to my hero, they would perhaps weary the reader, and so I forbear to write them at the close of this chapter.





CHAPTER XIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

“Friends? ay, more than friends, indeed,
They knew each other’s hearts.”

ANON.

MY dear Amy,” said Mrs. Thorn, as soon as the visitors were gone; “my dear Amy, you and Mr. Gerald seemed to be tremendously busy just now when we came in. He looked quite annoyed at being interrupted?”

“I dare say he was, mamma; visitors *will* come in at such awkward times, you see, just when they are not wanted. And of all people in the world, those two old gossips the Curate and his wife!”

“ My dear, you must not call her his wife when you know she is nothing of the kind. It’s the mere tittle tattle of the parish, you may depend on it. Sarah Satchell is far too respectable a young woman.”

“ *Old*, mamma, old woman if you like; she recollects the Battle of the Boyne, I know.”

“ Well, old woman then, but far too respectable to encourage any such idle talk.”

“ But she made him an offer, mamma, that is well known—on the night of the Jacksons’ party—and he only got out of it by saying that he already had a mother-in-law and four small children, who would have to come and live with him if he took a house and got married.”

“ Nonsense, Amy, he is not a widower; only a little while ago, and the parish were all saying that she was in love with Mr. Gerald, and that he really liked her.”

“That I don’t believe for a moment.”

“Why not, my dear? She has a very good house and a capital income, and would make him a capital wife. I should think it very likely, indeed.”

“Not in the least likely as far as he is concerned.”

“How can you possibly tell that, Amy? He has been looking melancholy enough for months past, poor young man.”

“Because he happens to like somebody else, mamma, that’s all.”

“My dear Amy, you really must be careful what you are saying. How can a young lady tell whether a young gentleman likes somebody else or not?”

“Well, in this case, mamma, I happen to know it you see, because he told me so.”

“My dear child, you are more puzzling than ever. Why should he tell *you* of all people in the world?”

“ Simply because I was that somebody else, I suppose. He said that he loved me better than his own life, and I really felt inclined to believe him, and told him so. But then——”

“ You told him to speak to your father, I hope, Amy ?”

“ No, mamma, I certainly did nothing of the kind. I told him that I was a great deal older than he, and had seen more of the world, and that he had no notion what a selfish, extravagant, thing a wife was ; and so I advised him to wait for a few years, and make his fortune, and then if he found a charming damsel ready to love him, by all means to marry, if she would have him. Wasn’t that good advice ?”

“ My dear child, what a clever girl you are ! the very best advice you could possibly have given him.”

“ I am afraid that he did not think so,

mamma. Young men don't like young ladies' advice unless it just happens to agree with their own wishes, however clever it may be."

"And you don't care a grain for him then, Amy?"

"Well, mamma, a grain is a very small quantity. I like him, you see, well enough, and I owe him my life, and I think he is a good-hearted generous fellow; but I don't want to marry just now, and a few years' knocking about in the world will improve him very much, though he cannot see that just at present."

For the next few minutes crochet and netting progressed in silence, and then as the first bell rang the two ladies went to dress for dinner.

Alone in her own room, Amy began to think over matters a little more seriously than she had yet done, or might be supposed

to do if judged only by the lively talk between mother and daughter. But it was her nature to speak lightly and fluently even of matters that she felt deeply; and the channel into which her thoughts now fell was of a far graver cast.

Thus they ran. She was pleased, as every woman is, when a man worthy of love pays her the highest compliment in his power by offering to make her his wife; and doubly so because she felt the compliment, and really liked the man who made it. He was very pleasant, she knew, as an acquaintance, as a friend to play chess with, or to dispute with—for argument was her favourite amusement—but scarcely as a husband. She had never really thought of him in that light. She was quite content with her present condition. Possibly she might have, during the past year, rather encouraged his devotion to herself, and led

him a little way on towards the avowal which he had just made; and in this possibly she was not without blame, as she even allowed to herself; but still, if young men were so easily ensnared the fault no doubt was mainly their own. She had never really meant to make a conquest of him with malice prepense; and after all he would soon get over it;—of this there was not a doubt.

At this moment the second bell rang; she put a rose in her hair and went down to dinner with rather a flushed cheek, and a brighter sparkle in her eyes than usual.

Mr. Thorn was in unusually good spirits when he came home to dinner that day, and showed it, as he always did, to every body in the house. The fact is that the Guaxara shares had gone up to “par” that morning, and at a meeting of the committee-

the secretary had foretold a glorious future for that famous silver mine, increased fees to the directors, and dividends to the fortunate shareholders.

“I only wish,” he said to his wife as they were dressing, “that those two young fellows had laid out a thousand or so more.”

Then he heard the news of what Amy had said and done that morning in the matter of Mr. Gerald Hastings, and this pleased him all the more.

He was full of fun and anecdote, and joking all through dinner; insomuch that Binks, a most staid and respectable old man-servant who waited at table, was hardly able to keep his countenance. Dinner however was over at last, and when the servants had retired he at once began to quiz his daughter.

“I am afraid, Amy, that you are fast becoming a very wicked young woman!”

“Me, papa! what in the world do you mean?” (though she knew as well as he did what was coming).

“My dear child, you are simply turning the heads of half the young men in the parish. And to-day, as I understand, you have hooked and landed another victim, poor Gerald Hastings!”

“No, no, papa; you have misunderstood the whole affair. He, very foolishly I must own, hooked himself, but I declined altogether to land him, though he strongly insisted on being landed; on the contrary, I gave him some good advice, and told him he had much better sail away down the stream, rise to something above the level of Barton Manor, and having made himself famous, look out for a young lady who loved him, and was indeed worthy of his love.”

“Just the very advice I should have given

myself if he had come to me. By Jove, Amy——”

“My dear papa, pray don’t invoke the heathen deities on me.”

“Never mind, child, you would have made a firstrate lawyer; not one young lady in a hundred could have given such capital advice. What did he say to it?”

“Well, he couldn’t say much, it was so disagreeable; of course he won’t take it, whatever he said.”

“I am not so sure of that, Amy. He is a keen, sensitive fellow, is young Gerald, and the sharp word of a woman would prick him like a needle. He will be flying off somewhere to make his fortune before long, depend on it. Don’t be too hard on him, Amy; though I must say that Antony is the better man of the two, and his position, you see, is secure.”

“Yes, yes, papa, I have no doubt. But

I am quite content where I am, at Barton Villa, for the present. And as to Mr. Antony, he may have views of his own, and another lady of the manor in his eye; but at all events I am not in that envied position."

" My dear, you have but to hold up your little finger."

" And that is just what I certainly will not do for all the lords of the manor on this side of—"

" Jordan," interrupted the lawyer, seeing that she had taken his words more seriously than he meant. " I must have both those young men here to dinner some day soon, for if these *Guaxaras* once begin to go up there is no knowing where they may stop, and Antony Hastings, if I know the man, will be crazy to have another fifty."

And then he turned the conversation to other things, told them amusing stories

about the Law Courts, and a squabble between the Deputy Judge and two barristers, who began by quarrelling between themselves on some point of legal etiquette, and ended, when called to order, by abusing His Honour on the bench.

The shrewd old lawyer knew all the three men well, and mimicked their voices and manner with great readiness; so that his two listeners soon forgot all about the *Guaxaras* and young Hastings, as he fully intended that they should; and were laughing heartily at the unfortunate Deputy Judge—better known as a fluent and amusing speaker on the platform of Ragged Schools and Dorcas Societies than as an expounder of the law in the Court over which he presided.

An hour's music and some more amusing gossip brought the evening to a close, just in the manner Thorn desired. He had

made up his mind that his daughter should some day become Antony's wife, but he was wisely content with having just sowed the seed in a light and casual manner that gave no room for the suspicion of his having any such object in view. Gerald's offer of that morning had quietly effected what he had been vainly trying to do for months past.

"The very best thing," he said to his wife that night when alone in their own room—"the very best thing that young man can do is to follow Amy's advice, both for her and for himself—and above all for me. He is now just mooning away his life in pursuit of 'nothings'; getting deeper and deeper in this crazy idea of being in love, and preventing her from making a really good match. But, for mercy's sake, Jane, whatever you do, don't oppose her in anything she likes to do or say about him—

and never, even remotely, allude to Antony Hastings as a husband or lover."

"Me, John?—as if I were at all likely to be mentioning such a thing!"

"Not in the least likely, Jane, but certain to do it. You women can no more help gossiping and fidgeting over the idea of a new match, or a bit of love-making, than kittens can avoid drinking milk. It's meat and drink to you all ; and with your tender heart, no two young people are safe for a week, if you once take to prophesying. But this time you must be careful."

"What shameful things you do say, John ! Not one wife in a hundred would ever allow herself to be talked to in this way!"

"And you, my dear, are that very one; add but a grain or two of discretion in this particular case, by simply seeming to throw cold water on the whole idea, and

especially on Antony Hastings as at all a marrying man, and you will be one in a thousand. A touch of seeming opposition is all that Amy needs to do what I wish."

Then Mr. Thorn said good night to the partner of his bosom, and calmly resigned himself to the arms of Morpheus. In two minutes, he was ostensibly sound asleep; but in reality carefully thinking over the events of the day, and mapping out his plan of action for many days to come.

He was a man of infinite dexterity in little things; and wisely thought that nothing was too unimportant or trifling for him to do well. '*Aut bene, aut nil,*' was a motto in which he thoroughly believed.

This was the maxim which he carried out to the very letter, wherever he went, and whatever he did. There was not a scrap of slovenly work in his entire round

of business. Not that he always succeeded ; for no man but a fool ever does always succeed.

But Jack Thorn's failures, in their way were successes. If utterly beaten and routed—bag and baggage—he still contrived that his retreat should be a triumph in its neatness and utter defiance of the enemy.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE MINERVA CLUB.

“Here witlings, sages, would-be bards, and sparks
Of first-rate water, meet and talk.”

HARRISON.

HE Minerva Club was, as everybody knows, the offspring of the great Megatherium. But, unlike its famous and fashionable parent in St. James's Street, it had been founded almost beyond the borders of civilized life, in a strip of debateable land that lies between the strict world of Babylon and the outlying suburb of Barton Manor. It was meant for younger sons—for those who knew that a guinea was a guinea—

who knew it had to be worked for and spent with care.

But none the less was it a very genial and pleasant assemblage of young, active, and “clubable” men. Among its members were to be found a goodly sprinkle of rising young barristers and of clever artists ; literary men just beginning to make their mark, and prophesying great things of what ought to be done and what must be done in the next ten years ; with “just a dash of idlers to relieve—as Grassy the rich sugar-baker’s son said—a dash of idlers to relieve the monotony of genius and the glory of work.”

Old Thorn was an honorary member of this club, and it was through his influence that Gerald had been introduced into it. And thus far the atmosphere of the Minerva had agreed with him well. If he had found no friends there, he had

formed several pleasant acquaintances, and often enjoyed the cool, self-assured, talk that went on with unbroken freshness at dinner and in the billiard room, among young men mostly of his own age, but who had seen far more of life ; and though they had learned many things by reading mankind, yet were not above learning wisdom from books.

It was this fact which had gradually led to the formation of a good library and made Gerald a frequent visitor to the Minerva ; for in the comfortable reading room attached to it he spent many happy hours, which became more frequent than ever after the events of the last chapter. The society of Barton Manor grew more and more distasteful to him, and Captain Punter positively offensive, as the Minerva became more and more agreeable.

The Secretary of the Club was an old

half-pay Major of the Indian army, with whom Gerald had become great friends, and thus came about the following short dialogue, which the thread of my story obliges me to introduce, as it bore lasting and important fruit:—

“I have been thinking,” said the Major, one morning, “that our books are in a most lamentable state of confusion. Many of them are, I believe, trash, but a far larger number are good; though we hardly know what we really have, and how many are no better than waste paper. Do you chance to know, Hastings, of any fellow that understands such work, and would come here and put the whole thing square, catalogue the books, and tell us what to do, for a reasonable sum of money?”

“Well, Major, I think I know the very man. But he is blind.”

“No, no, my dear fellow, I don’t mean to come the charitable dodge ; no, no, confound it, not a blind man.”

“But there is no charity in this case, I assure you. The man I mean is not a cad, but the son of a man of family and position. He would not touch a penny from Minerva herself if he hadn’t well earned it, but he chooses to be a bookseller and work for his bread. Of course, he would employ a proper man under him, use *his* fingers, and supply the necessary brains himself. If you want your catalogue well done and wish to have it weeded of trash, you had better employ Glenny. That is, if he will take the post.”

“By all means, then,” said the Major, “see your Phœnix, and let me know what the cost of the work will be, when you have told him the state of affairs.”

The issue of this talk was that Martin Glenny undertook the work; coming to the Minerva for an hour or two three or four times a week, and superintending the whole business of cataloguing and valuation; seeing a little of Gerald at almost every visit, and amusing the members that he met there by the shrewdness of his talk and by his keen knowledge of men as well as books.

His usual place of work was in a small ante-room adjoining the library, devoted to books of the past century—where his assistant brought to him page by page of the catalogue, and read it aloud for revision.

Now and then a stray man came into the room, in search of some odd volume of plays or essays, but for the most part it was deserted and quiet, and far better suited for Glenny's work than the bustle of

the larger room. Now and then, too, some one member chose to hang up his coat and hat in the ante-room as he passed into the library ; but with these exceptions he was rarely interrupted. His work was to last for some months, as he had expressly bargained to take his own time over it, only promising that it should be done well and completely at the last.

One dreary, rainy night, however, long before it was completed, Glenny left his work rather earlier than usual and went home to dinner. That over, after a good game of romps with his children and a gossip with his wife, he suddenly slapped his hand on his thigh—which was his peculiar way of noting that he had almost forgotten what he was specially bound to remember.

“ Mary,” said he, “ where is to-day’s paper? There is a trial in it, I’m told, of one

of these 'Spiritual' humbugs who has just now got hold of some rich widow and gulled her into the belief that he had a message for her from her deceased husband, in which she was charged to spend all her soul's love on the dear medium. The rascal's real name is Nebuchadnezzar Meldrum, the same scoundrel who once tried to gull me. His pet name to the old woman (the old goose) being Nebbie, 'her darling Nebbie.' She has spent many thousands on him, and put some thirty or forty thousand more in the Funds in his name, and as long as she was content with this sort of folly all went well enough; but the old goose (forgive me, my dear, old single ladies will be such fools) at last wanted to marry him, and he refused to have her. Her money he could endure, but her very actual self was too great a blessing. Do see if you can find anything about it in the evening paper."

“Martin, you are very hard on old single ladies and on poor ‘Nebbie,’ I must say; especially after your patronizing him as you once did.”

“Yes, my dear, I did patronize him, but my eyes have been opened since then. As long as he confined himself to table-turning, raps, accordions playing in the air, and bells ringing without hands, he fairly puzzled me I confess; but when he had the impudence to tell me that the spirit of my own father (who was a scholar and a gentleman) had sent a message some ten lines long, in which, after charging me to love ‘Nebbie’ the dear medium as my best friend, he made two mistakes in grammar and three in spelling, I knew it to be an imposture. ‘It’s a gross and infamous lie,’ I said, ‘whoever brought you that message, or wherever he came from;’ for my father would rather have died than have spelt

sperittal with two *t*'s, or *frendship* with only one *i*—as if Almighty God didn't know how to send a message to a man's soul as correctly as a telegraph clerk!"

"My dear Martin, don't get savage with me, and don't get profane, please."

"That is exactly what 'dear Nebby' said, and his '*fidus Achates*' with the bald head, who shows him off.

"'Dear friend,' says Nebbie Meldrum, 'if you would believe, the sperits say they could restore your sight by a speritual power of cleansing and renewing, as surely as you now hear the voice of their dear brother, the medium.'

"'Thank you,' said I, 'they have opened my eyes already; and I see clearly now, that if this lying message has anything whatever to do with spirits it is with the father of lies himself. So no more of 'dear brothering' for me.'

“‘Oh!’ says Brother Badger (that’s the chap with the oily tongue, who does the religious dodge), ‘do not let us have any strife; *Strife is offensive to Gaud*, as one of the dear spirits by my little mahogany table told us the other night. Pray be at peace, *Strife is offensive to Gaud*. It is a beautiful sentiment, Mr. Glenny.’

“‘Yes,’ said I; ‘and it has the advantage of being so charmingly new as well as beautiful. It is almost as good as one of the boys’ copy-slips at school. *Strife is offensive to God*. Is it? Yes; and so is lying and swindling and humbug of every kind. And if you want a text for that direct from ‘Gaud,’ I’ll give you one out of His own word; without spelling His name the wrong way, and without asking the leg of a mahogany table to kick it out for me.’

“And so, ever since then, between the

house of Glenny and the house of Badger there has been strife to this very day. But now, Mary, let me have the last scrap of news about 'Nebbie.' ”

She accordingly set to work forthwith, and read aloud to her husband the headings of various paragraphs in “*This Day's Intelligence*”—such as “Awful Suicide,” “Astounding Conduct of a Radical M.P.,” “A Man may not Marry his own Aunt,” “Strange Affair at the Minerva—”

“At the what?” Mary.

“The Minerva. Shall I read it?”

“Well—yes; you may as well read it.”

Then she read as follows:—

“*This morning a strange affair took place at the well-known club the 'Minerva,' in Oban Street. For some time past a system of petty robbery has been carried on in that establishment, which has completely baffled all the*

authorities in the house, as well as that well-known officer Inspector Polter, who has had the case in hand for some weeks. This morning, however, a clue having been obtained, the culprit turned out to be one of the members of the club. He was at once given in charge this afternoon, and brought before MR. BEAK, at the Barton police court, his being the district in which the offence was committed. The prisoner, who stoutly denied the charge, was, after a preliminary examination, remanded until Monday morning. He was said to be well connected, and his name to be Hastings. He was afterwards liberated on heavy bail.”

At this last word, the Blind man leaped suddenly from his chair, and struck the table violently with his open hand.

“Good Heavens!” he cried, “it’s Gerald

Hastings. There must be some lie at the bottom of this. Send for a cab at once, Mary. I will be off and see Polter."

"My dear Martin, who in the world is Polter? Why should you go off to him at this time of night?"

"You are the best of little women, Mary (and all little women are good), but Why and Because is a game that ladies do not rightly understand: so, best of little women, send for my cab."

A cab was soon found, and in it the blind man went off to the station-house of the K division. Mr. Inspector Polter was visible, and as urbane and gracious as ever; but half an hour later Glenny came back to the wife of his bosom in a state of quiet and subdued wrath which showed that his mission was, so far, a failure.

“ Well, Martin,” said she, “ what news? Is it Gerald Hastings, and what can you do?”

“ O irrepressible young woman,” he answered, “ I have no news. Mr. Polter is simply a pig, and declines to enter into the subject of a prisoner on remand, unless I come to say something not in his favour, in which case, as I can well see, he will gladly hear me. Meanwhile, the inspector graciously permits me to attend to-morrow morning at eleven in the regular open court, and hear what they have trumped up against him. A pack of infernal lies, I say, beyond all doubt.”

“ Lies, without a question, Martin, if they accuse Mr. Gerald Hastings of being a thief, whether infernal or not—”

“ My dear Mary, all lies are infernal, especially about blind men, booksellers,

and their friends—remember that. Gerald Hastings is no more guilty of picking pockets than I am of enlisting in the dragoons. But *tace* is the Latin for candle, so do not add to our troubles by ‘why and because,’ to which I can supply no more answers. Jane, too, has just brought the bedroom candle, I think as a hint to us, which I for one shall not find it hard to take.”

His wife saw how matters were at a glance. It was seldom indeed that her husband felt and spoke so strongly as he had done that night; and every little courtesy of manner to herself which was now wanting she knew how to attribute to its right cause, and was too wise and too good to make the subject of a moment’s irritation. She saw that he was infinitely put out by the whole occurrence, being far more ready than able to help the friend whose

trouble had so disquieted him, and still more anxious to prove for his own satisfaction that he had done all that could and ought to be done.

END OF VOL. I.



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